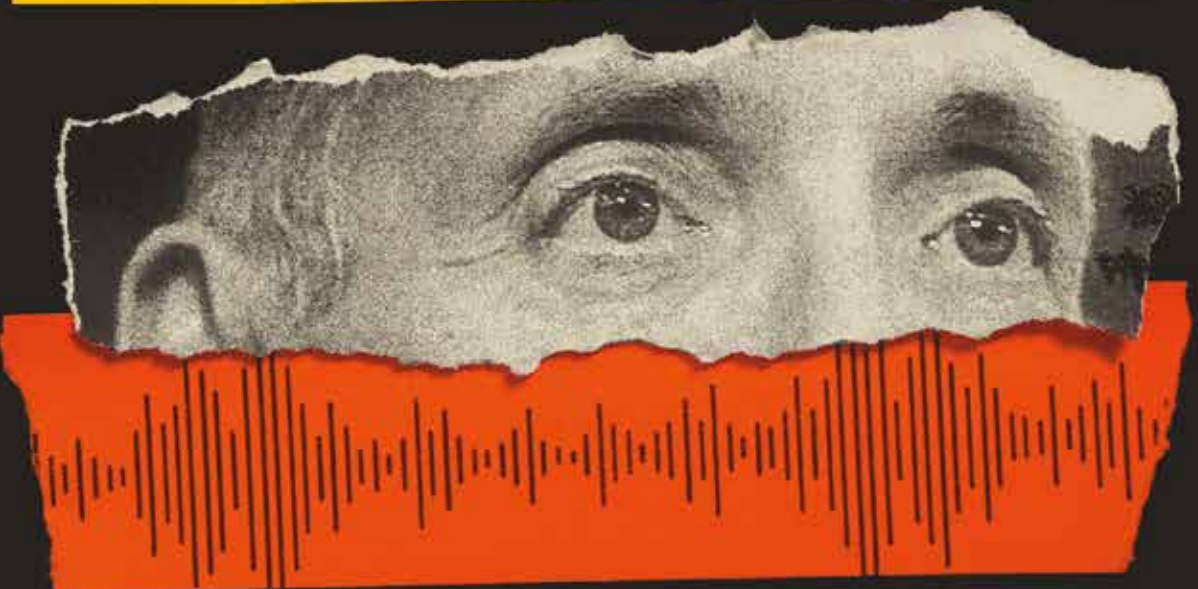
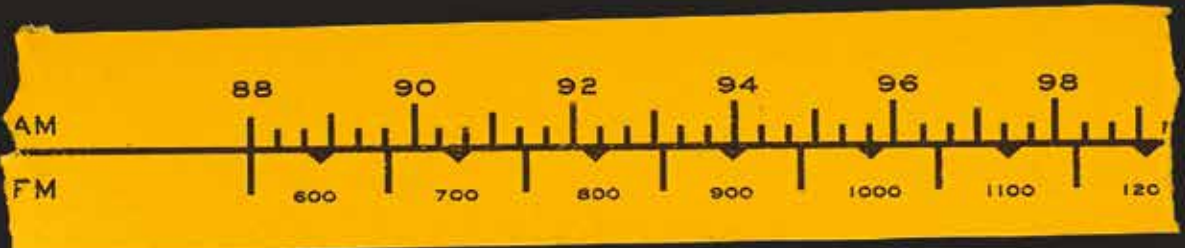




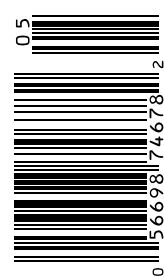
THE SHADOWY NETWORK THAT POISONED OUR AIRWAVES



faith in action for social justice

U.S. Can.

\$ 4.95

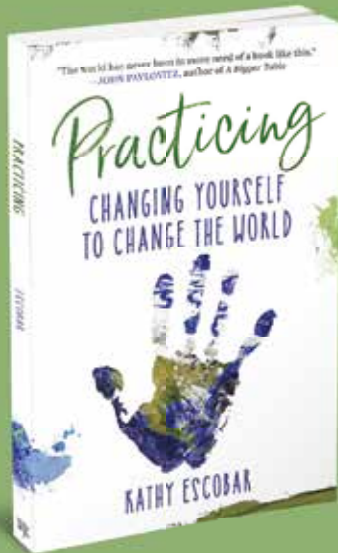


May 2020

sojo.net

Vol. 49 No. 5

New Spring Books

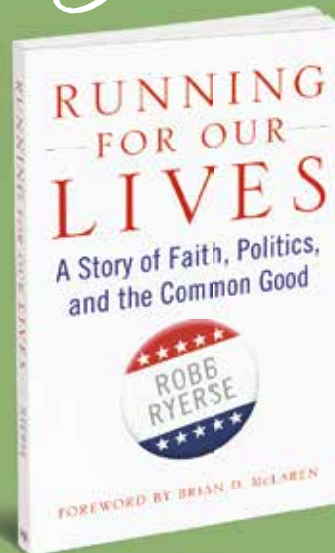


9780664265847 — Paper — \$18.00

“The world has never been in more need of a book like this.”

—John Pavlovitz,
author of
A Bigger Table

Discover how you have more power to change the world than you realize with ten transformational practices to live out your faith with real, concrete action.

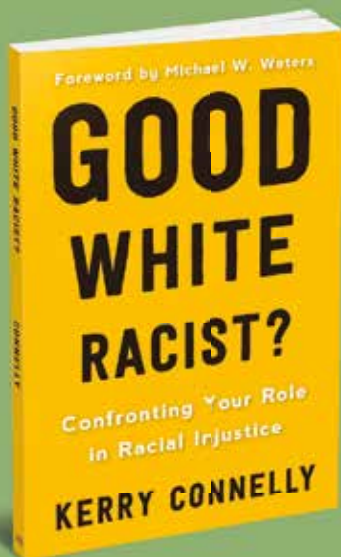


9780664266219 — Paper — \$17.00

“If you’ve been vexed by the turn in religious voting in America, you’ll be relieved and encouraged after reading this book.”

—Rob Schenck,
author of
Costly Grace

Evangelical pastor and progressive Republican Robb Ryerse explores the relationship between religion and politics and the power of faithful people working for the common good after his long-shot congressional campaign in 2018.

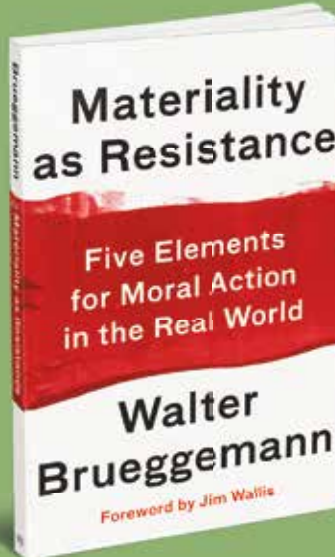


9780664265748 — Paper — \$17.00

“What Kerry has started is the hard work of ‘white folk work’ in a stunning and powerful volume.”

—Rev. Lenny Duncan,
author of *Dear Church*

Kerry Connelly exposes the ways white people participate in, benefit from, and unknowingly perpetuate racism—despite their best “good person” intentions.



9780664266264 — Paper — \$15.00

“Walter Brueggemann has crafted a compact but potent call for the modern church to return to Christ’s message and model of living.”

—Brandan Robertson,
author of
True Inclusion

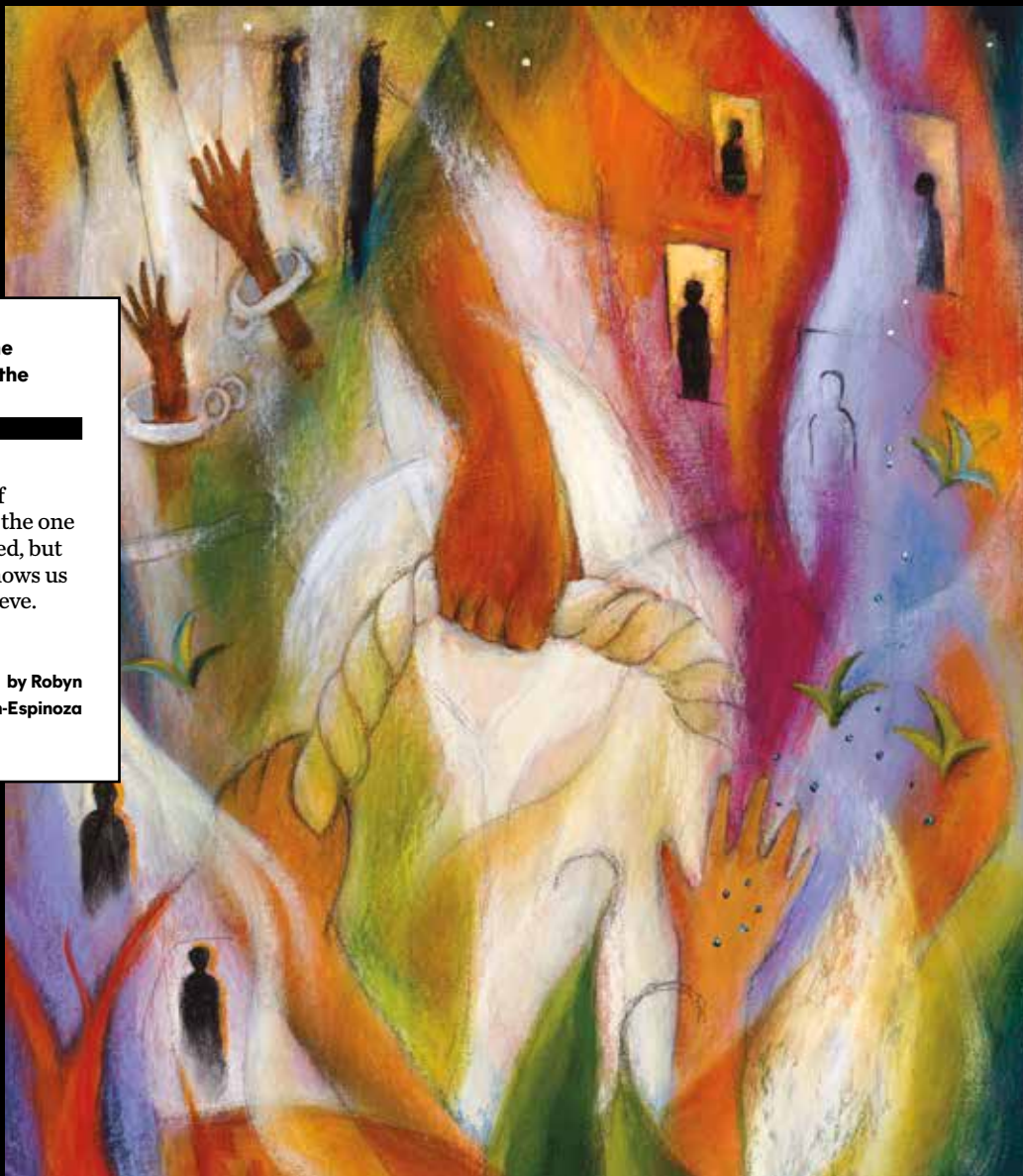
In the five areas of food, money, the body, time, and place, Walter Brueggemann explores how we can reengage our materiality (the use of the material aspects of Christian faith) for the common good.

"I THINK GETTING OUR HANDS DIRTY IS CONNECTED TO SALVATION."

Touching the Wounds of the World

We think of Thomas as the one who doubted, but his story shows us how to believe.

by Robyn
Henderson-Espinoza



32

22

A Conspiracy of Lies Behind the secretive network that convinced Americans they cannot trust East Coast "elites." An interview with investigative journalist Anne Nelson.

by Jonathan
Wilson-Hartgrove

28

The Stones Cry Out Berlin's memorials to individual Holocaust victims destabilized me—and my faith in a god of safety.

by Ali
Tranvik

Voices

6	Spotlight
9	Mobilizing Hope This planet can't breathe. by Adam Russell Taylor
	Commentary
12	Tax Cuts Charitable giving is down due to Trump's tax overhaul. by Jim Simpson
14	Polish Catholics Protesters won't let the church abandon social teachings. by Ryszard Bobrowicz
15	Church Closures How to be a good neighbor to a dying congregation. by Susan R. Masters
	Columns
16	Moving Mountains When voters are too traumatized to gamble. by Lisa Sharon Harper
18	The Hungry Spirit There's nothing "pro-life" about President Trump. by Rose Marie Berger
19	Deep Economy Lessons from the coronavirus pandemic. by Bill McKibben
	Eyewitness
20	When blood cries out, how do we answer? by Erricka Bridgeford



Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly, except September-October is combined, at 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

46



39

Vision

	Culture
39	Music The Many breaks the worship music mold. by Ariel Parrella-Aureli
41	On Screen Mary Magdalene inspires feminist electronica. by Chris Karnadi
42	Eyes and Ears There are more than two sides to <i>The Two Popes</i> . by Danny Duncan Collum
	Reviews
43	Books Dogma and desire in <i>This Is My Body</i> . by Jera Brown
44	Will churches make room for #MeToo? by Jon Little
45	Intersectional feminism in the early 1900s. by Anne Colamosca
	Poetry
46	So much lying has torn words loose. by Jeanne Murray Walker
	Living the Word
48	Will we know when the Spirit of truth comes upon us? by Celeste Kennel-Shank
	H'rumps
50	Anybody else think William Barr looks like Elton John? by Ed Spivey Jr.

IS THE AMERICAN DREAM COMPATIBLE WITH THE LIFE OF FAITH?

"This trenchant Christian critique of American exceptionalism provides an essential, passionate interpretation of the ideals of egalitarianism."

★ PUBLISHERS WEEKLY,
starred review



D. L. MAYFIELD



#readivp
shop ivpress.com

LOVE JESUS
grow in faith
CHANGE THE WORLD

Sunday School that lights the way.
www.ShineCurriculum.com

SHINE
LIVING IN GOD'S LIGHT

From the Editor

Even if we don't spend our time listening to talk radio, most of us are aware that much of what passes for "discourse" on the airwaves these days is filled with vitriol and venom. But it wasn't always that way. When

I was growing up, radio commentator Paul Harvey was a regular background companion to our family's dashed before-school breakfasts. Harvey, one of the precursors—but oh so different—to today's shock jocks, offered a gentle heartland wisdom as he spun his daily stories, usually punctuated by a surprise ending and his signature line, "Now you know ... the rest of the story."

How did we move from that kind of rural Americana to the dishonest, hate-laced spewing of talk jocks such as Trump honoree Rush Limbaugh? As Anne Nelson explains to Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove in this issue, it wasn't an accident. Rather, her research shows, it was part of an intentional effort to use everything from old media, such as radio, to the sophisticated exploitation of Big Data for hardcore, extremist political purposes. We see the result every day in our abased, uncivil public discourse and in the reality-TV nature of contemporary politics.

RESPONSE

Oh, the Irony

In "Boycott Facebook?" (March 2020) Danny Duncan Collum debated whether churches should continue using the social media megacorporation. Readers weighed in—via Facebook: "It's very dangerous. I wrestle with this possibility every day and yet recognize FB is part of the public square," said Laura Norton . "The public square has always been a noisy place," said John T Manley . "Stay involved, get to know the falsehoods being shared, actively preach the truth. Jesus did not abandon the temple, he just went out into the streets and countryside, too." Others found humor: "Posting an article about the evils of Facebook on Facebook is its own delicious irony," wrote Mike Baldwin .

Write us: response@sojo.net



"I THINK HOPE- LESSNESS IS THE ENEMY OF JUSTICE."

Bryan Stevenson
Founder, Equal Justice Initiative

CONTRIBUTING



Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

Preacher and activist Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove begins each day in prayer with members of Rutba House, the community his family shares with the formerly incarcerated and unhoused. As a leader in the Poor People's Campaign, he remains hopeful that "the money and manipulations of the Religious Right won't have the last word" (p. 22). "I get to work every day with people who know the power of God to make a way out of no way, to lift up the humble, and bring the mighty down from their thrones."



Robyn Henderson-Espinoza

"We can't do theology without thinking about activism," says Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza. "As a liberationist, I believe that our theology is about action and doing work in the world" (p. 32). The transqueer activist, Latinx scholar, and author of *Activist Theology* is passionate about bridging the deep disconnect that exists in the "borderland spaces of church, academy, and movements." Henderson-Espinoza considers Gloria E. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* a touchstone for the work they do.

Jim Wallis President/Editor-in-Chief
Robert Wilson-Black Chief Executive Officer
Adam Russell Taylor Executive Director
Karen L. Lattea Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer
Michael Norman Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
Larisa Friesen Hall Vice President and Chief Advancement Officer

Jim Rice Editor
Ed Spivey Jr. Art Director
Julie Polter Managing Editor
Rose Marie Berger Senior Associate Editor
Betsy Shirley Associate Editor
Da'Shawn Mosley Assistant Editor

Sandi Villarreal Web Editor and Chief Digital Officer
Bob Sabath Director of Web and Digital Technology
Dhanya Addanki Associate Web Editor
Daniel José Camacho Associate Web Editor
Jenna Barnett Associate Web Editor
Christian Smuttherman Multimedia Director
Kayla Lattimore Video Producer
Heather Brady Audience Engagement Editor
Lisa Daughtry-Weiss Sr. Dir. of Fdn. Relations, Performance Officer
Sandra Sims Senior Director of Advancement
Cynthia J. Martens Senior Director of Circulation and Production
Kaitlin Levenstrong Director of Major Gifts
Beth Cooper-Chrismon Director of Individual Giving
Rachel Buller Donor Services and Database Manager
Feriel Pietersen Ricks Development Associate, Planned Giving
Rose Urankar Advertising Sales Manager
Sandy Ovalle Director of Campaigns and Mobilizing
Terrance M. McKinley Director of Racial Justice and Mobilizing
Elizabeth Denlinger Reaves Senior Program Director
Melody Zhang Climate Justice Campaign Coordinator
Susanna Bean Digital Mobilizing Coordinator
Paola Fuentes Gleghorn Immigration/Women & Girls Campaign Coordinator
Brian Thomas Accountant
Krystal Brewer Office Manager
James Simpson Director of the President's Office and Advocacy
J.K. Granberg-Michaelson Assistant to the President
Meredith Brasher Press Secretary to the President
Aria Christenson Executive Assistant

FELLOWS **Joey Chin**, Editorial; **Hannah Conklin**, Editorial; **Benjamin Cox**, Administration; **Chelsey J. Johnson**, Donor Services; **Lucas Keller**, Mobilizing; **Christine Lee**, Campaigns; **Julianna Swyers Nikodym**, Circulation; **Miguel A. Petrosky**, Communications; **Candace Sanders**, Multimedia/Online; **Jayne Smith**, Advertising

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Michelle Alexander, Diana Butler Bass, Walter Brueggemann, Joan Chittister, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan Collum, Michael Curry, Edwidge Danticat, Marie Dennis, Julian DeShazier, E.J. Dionne Jr., Kelly Brown Douglas, Joshua DuBois, Michael Eric Dyson, Reta Halteman Finger, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, Eddie Glaude, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, David Gushee, Cynthia L. Hale, Lisa Sharon Harper, Jen Hatmaker, Obery Hendricks, Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros, Barbara A. Holmes, Joel Hunter, Kathy Khang, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Anne Lamott, James Martin, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Jeanie Ree V. Moore, Otis Moss III, Ched Myers, Whitney Parnell, Eboo Patel, Myrna Pérez, Soong-Chan Rah, Richard Rohr, Alexia Salvatierra, Rob Schenck, Najeeba Syeed, Barbara Brown Taylor, Sharon E. Watkins, Cornel West, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Randy Woodley, Bill Wylie-Kellermann, Jenny Yang, Faith-Marie Zambé

Sojourners Online: sojo.net, **Twitter:** @sojourners
 Get free email updates at sojo.net/email_subscription.

OUR MISSION

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

BUSINESS AND EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Please send all business and editorial correspondence to Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002.

SUBSCRIPTION AND CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Subscribers: Visit sojo.net/subscribe to manage your subscription or print change of address on a card with old address label attached; send all subscription correspondence and address changes (except countries listed below) to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856, call 1-800-678-9691, or email us at sojourners@cambeywest.com (allow six weeks to process any address change). **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:** Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.S.: \$39.95 one year print (for first-class mail, \$50). Digital subscriptions to Sojourners are available for \$19.95 at sojo.net/subscribe. **Australia:** \$78 one year (via air mail, paid in Australian currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 610, Unley 5061 SA). **New Zealand:** \$97 one year (via air mail, paid in New Zealand currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 9483, Wellington, NZ); email admin@mediacom.org.au. **Canada:** \$49.95 one year (paid in USD). **All other international** (six to eight weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. **Air service overseas** (two to three weeks delivery): \$69.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

NEWSSTAND CIRCULATION

Newsstand circulation through Districor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@districor.com.

ADVERTISING

Advertisement in *Sojourners* does not imply editorial endorsement. For information on display advertising in *Sojourners*, please write to: Advertising, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002; advertising@sojo.net, or visit sojo.net.

SUBMISSIONS

Submission guidelines can be found at: sojo.net/write. Please direct poetry to the Poetry Editor by post (address below) or at poetry@sojo.net; and books, music, and reviews to the Review Editor by post or at reviews@sojo.net. No submissions will be returned.

Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper. All content copyright ©2020 Sojourners 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Phone (202) 328-8842



20
million

Estimated weekly
listeners to *The Rush*
Limbaugh Show

27.4
million

Weekly on-air listeners
to all NPR programming

102
minutes

Average time Americans
spent listening to radio
each day in 2019



1

MOBILIZING HOPE

BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR

A PLANET GASPING FOR BREATH

In 2018, climate scientists reached a consensus that, based on current global emissions, we have roughly 12 years to dramatically reverse course before we cause irreparable harm to our planet and our way of life. These and other predictions cause me to lose sleep at night, particularly when I think about the world that my two sons will inherit.

But this alarming trend is not inevitable, nor are we powerless to change course. Preventing the worst consequences and putting the planet on a zero-carbon trajectory will require a revolution of social and political will. Catalyzing this revolution will require new language, new metaphors, and new messengers.

**“THE CHURCH
REMAINS FAR TOO
COMPLACENT AMID
THIS CLIMATIC
REVOLUTION.”**

“WE HEAR THE PLANET CRYING, ‘I CAN’T BREATHE.’”

“I can’t breathe.” These were the prophetic words said by my pastor, Rev. Howard John-Wesley, in a sermon in which he made the case that we are on the brink of ecological destruction. He preached about the thousands of species that go extinct every year. He emphasized that Americans constitute 5 percent of the world’s population but burn 25 percent of the world’s fossil fuels. These and other trends of conspicuous consumption and abuse are driving us toward global catastrophe.

Based on these sobering trends, he lifted up the tragic last words of Eric Garner, an African American man who was viciously asphyxiated by police using an illegal choke hold, alluding to how our planet, too, is exclaiming, “I can’t breathe.” Through floods such as Katrina and Harvey, we hear the planet gasping, “I can’t breathe.” Amid out of control wildfires in California and Australia, our planet is hollering, “I can’t breathe.” The tragedy is that the church is too often unresponsive to the earth’s desperate cry.

Despite all the scientific evidence, our nation and the church remain far too complacent amid this climatic revolution, in part due to the tranquilizing influence of bad dominion theology and longstanding disinformation campaigns by big oil and coal. But another key factor is that the ways we talk about climate change often fail to resonate with the daily concerns of most people, particularly people of color. While there has been some progress, the environmental movement remains predominantly white and affluent. We must do better to lift up voices such as the courageous African farmers who have been on the frontlines of fighting climate change as a matter of survival or the people of color across the U.S. South and in major cities who have for decades been standing against environmental racism in the form of air pollution, undrinkable water, and toxic waste in their communities.

Eric Garner’s killing at the hands of police has a visceral and existential impact, because it reminds black and brown people that our very lives are under threat due to racialized policing and police violence. In a similar vein, the climate crisis increasingly poses an existential threat to all our lives and livelihoods, and yet we know the impacts will disproportionately hurt the already marginalized and disinherited. Yes, all creation is crying, “I can’t breathe.” The question is whether we are willing to break the stranglehold and hold those most responsible accountable. ✦



Adam Russell Taylor is executive director of Sojourners.

**OWN THE
BLU-RAY™ 4/14
& DIGITAL MOVIE NOW**

BLU-RAY™ + DIGITAL CODE

JUST MERCY

#JUSTMERCY
@JUSTMERCYFILM

SCAN
TO SEE
MORE!

PG-13
PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 13

© 2019 WBEL

BASED ON A TRUE STORY OF A MODERN HERO

A New Podcast



We may imagine that the sacred is set apart from life, but religion is involved in every aspect of our day-to-day world. Listen to stories about religion in everyday and unexpected places in the new series, *Sacred & Profane*.

religionlab.virginia.edu

Image: Santa Muerte, Mexico City © Rafael Ben-Ari/123RF.com

Produced by



Seasons 1 and 2 on

Google Podcasts



Standing up for justice.



Sandy Ovalle, Sojourners' Director of Campaigns and Organizing, leads a rally for immigrant rights.

SojoAction is a Sojourners community dedicated to putting our faith in action for social justice. Through curated conversations, online resources, and in-person gatherings, SojoAction provides the tools and training needed to activate communities and nourish the movement.

Learn more at sojo.net/sojoaction.

**SOJOURNERS
SojoAction**

‘TRICKLE-DOWN’ TAX CUTS

Most benefits of Trump's tax breaks accrue to Americans
with incomes in the top 5 percent.



2

President Trump spent a large portion of his State of the Union speech in February touting his economic accomplishments, including cutting taxes and “job-killing regulations.” But what has America gotten in exchange for the 2017 Republican tax overhaul?

First, 2018 showed the largest drop in household charitable contributions since the Great Recession and the first drop in more than five years. Despite steady economic growth over the past 10 years and a more than 5 percent increase in individual giving the year before, this dramatic decline has left many organizations—including local churches, food pantries, and homelessness services—struggling to meet the needs of those they serve.

The Republican-passed Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 was the most sweeping overhaul to the federal tax code in decades. Among other things, it doubled the standard deduction. It is no longer cost-effective for most Americans to itemize donations. This creates a “giving gap” between middle-class donors and ultra-wealthy donors.

Even some Republicans found these changes controversial. They were unable to hide

**"THANKS TO THE TAX OVERHAUL,
HOUSEHOLD CHARITABLE GIVING
DROPPED PRECIPITOUSLY IN 2018."**

that most benefits would accrue to Americans with incomes in the top 5 percent.

To put that in real numbers: Households with annual incomes of \$733,000 and up (the top 1 percent of Americans) are receiving a tax cut of around \$50,000. Those making between \$308,000 and \$733,000 saw the biggest tax benefit (as a percentage) and receive a break of \$11,000 or more. Households making less than \$86,000 a year receive less than an \$800 tax break. Americans in the bottom half of incomes are made poorer relative to those in the top half.

Second, political elites continue to push the fallacy of "trickle-down economics," suggesting that lower-income Americans are better off when the richest do well. This has never been borne out by any data or experience.

Wealth and income disparities are at near-record highs. More than 75 percent of Americans report that they are living paycheck to paycheck and nearly half say they could not afford an unbudgeted \$500 expense. Americans increasingly are left behind by an economy that does not serve them and a shift toward automatization that does not employ them. This is a two-fisted punch from ultra-wealthy corporate investors pushing technology designed to "reduce their labor costs"—jobs for people. And what's funding this process? The tax breaks Republicans claim will help the very people this process is making redundant.

Finally, the Trump tax cut is paid for by deficit spending. Almost single-handedly it has forced the annual deficit to rise to more than \$1 trillion. Deficits like this are extremely dangerous. They make it harder for the government to respond to public health, natural, and financial disasters—the very thing a government is supposed to do.

My prediction is that whenever Democrats are back "in control," the Republicans will, like clockwork, care again about the national debt and will use the massive deficit—caused by their own tax cuts—to justify slashing funding for infrastructure, jobs, and social programs that serve poor and working families.

The Republican tax overhaul, coupled with the inevitable return of deficit hawks fixated on cutting social programs, negatively impacts those most in need of economic stability. In the turmoil, the financially vulnerable will look to nonprofits, churches, and direct-service providers for help to provide for themselves and their families, and to live with dignity despite unfair circumstances. But will our churches and nonprofits—now experiencing massive shortfalls in funding brought about by the massive decline in donations due to the tax overhaul—be able to meet those needs? ♦

Jim Simpson is director of the president's office and advocacy at Sojourners.

LEARN HOW TO LEAD A VIBRANT FAITH COMMUNITY.

As a pastor, you're already an effective spiritual leader for your congregation.

But what about your role as leader of a complex organization?



Faith Leaders Week is a non-denominational, immersive learning experience for faith leaders that supplements religious training with the leadership and management skills to effectively manage an organization and lead teams of employees and volunteers.

Led by renowned faculty experienced in guiding faith-based organizations, participants explore a broad range of leadership issues while networking with fellow faith leaders from across the country, all in our unique executive education facility.

Faith Leaders Week: June 15-18, 2020

Topics covered include:

- The inclusive congregation
- Persuasion and influence
- Decision making
- Engaging volunteers
- Team building
- Leading mission-driven change

Register today to reserve your place! June is coming fast and seats are limited. Don't miss your chance to be a part of this immersive faith leadership training experience.

www.kell.gg/kxfaithwk | 847-491-3415
nonprofit@kellogg.northwestern.edu

Scholarships are available for faith leaders — plan now to join us in June!

Northwestern | Kellogg

CENTER FOR
Nonprofit Management

COMMENTARY

BY RYSZARD BOBROWICZ



‘WE WANT OUR CHURCH BACK’

Polish Catholics demand that bishops return to Catholic social teaching.

In October last year, protesters stood silently in the streets of Kraków and Szczecin in Poland. This gathering was not criticizing the ruling political party. Instead, their banners bore the slogan “We Want the Church Back,” echoing “We Are the Church” movements directed at the Catholic hierarchy by laity around the world.

These Roman Catholics call to account sermons offered by conservative Polish clergy. The clerical leadership is “dividing people and spreading hostility toward others instead of teaching about our merciful God,” the group explained in a petition. Many Catholics in Poland feel homeless because they experience hostility, condemnation, and exclusion from the pulpit. They want to publicly demonstrate that the Catholic Church is larger than priests and bishops; that everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or minority status, should be able to find a place in the church that calls itself catholic (which means “universal”). Finally, they demand that the priests and bishops not reject Pope Francis’ message and that Catholic social teaching, the church doctrines on human dignity and common good in society, be returned to the mainstream of Catholic life.

A month later in Gdańsk, 150 members of the archdiocese protested the bishops’ negligent handling of sexual abuse cases. They were responding to a study by the conference of bishops released in March that noted nearly 400 cases of Polish priests accused of abuse of minors between 1990 and

2018 and to the release of a documentary, *Don’t Tell Anyone*, in which priests are confronted by their victims. The hierarchy refused to investigate reported incidents and failed to openly support the victims. Lay Catholics also specifically criticized Gdańsk’s Archbishop Sławoj Leszek Głódź for his lavish lifestyle and confrontational communication style.

Widely publicized in the media, the “We Want the Church Back” demonstrations highlight the deep commitment the protesters have to their Catholic faith and emphasize the sense of responsibility they feel to combat the hijacking of their church.

In refusing to cede ownership of Catholicism to conservatives who have aligned with authoritarian politics, these activists amplify and mirror the critique of clericalism and far-right political alliances visible in the U.S. in the wake of sexual abuse scandals and white Catholic support for Donald Trump. The leadership in the U.S. Catholic Church has come under increasing criticism for overemphasizing the role of priests and bishops. In 2018, Pope Francis addressed all Catholics: “To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism.”

Catholics in Kraków, Gdańsk, and elsewhere join laity in other countries in demanding the return of basic Catholic social teaching in mainstream church discourse. These core doctrines are often replaced by an overemphasis on ritual from traditionalist groups or, in more extreme cases, with a right-wing political message, as exemplified by those from the U.S.-based Napa Institute or the Dignitatis Humanae Institute in Italy.

What is novel in the Polish protests is the subject of the critique. While the Polish church was historically known for its opposition to authoritarian regimes, the Catholic Church more globally was criticized for complicity with authoritarian regimes such as Franco’s Spain and Salazar’s Portugal. Now it is criticized for becoming a regime of its own. This has awakened in Polish Catholics a sense of individual responsibility to recover their church—and might bring seismic changes for the church around the world. ✦

Ryszard Bobrowicz, a Polish Catholic, is a PhD fellow in practical theology at Lund University in Sweden.

W

HOLY CLOSURE

When someone is dying, most of us know how to offer support. We don't question their treatment choices. We bring them meals and rake their leaves and shovel their sidewalks. When a congregation closes—or dies—such acts of kindness are no less important. As a Lutheran interim pastor who has led two congregations to “holy closure,” I offer some suggestions for how to accompany a congregation as it ends.

Don't make a decision to close more difficult by questioning it. A closing congregation has likely tried all the stewardship programs, read all the church-growth books, and revamped its outreach program a hundred times. For any number of reasons, none of those worked. Members feel as though they have failed in mission for God. What they need from the wider church is compassion and a reminder that Christians are people of resurrection who believe that life can spring from death. In fact, sometimes something needs to die so that something else can be birthed in its place. They will struggle to believe that, and you can remind them as often as they need to hear it that closure can be a faithful choice.

Be a good neighbor. The practical and legal details of closing a congregation are endless—and they come at a time when members are emotionally spent and grief-stricken. What a lovely opportunity for a nearby congregation to offer to pack up the kitchen or serve the congregation's final meal. A local colleague can offer to preach to give the pastor a break while she tends to all the extra tasks of closing. A bishop can dedicate a staff member to check in weekly with the leadership team to offer resources and support. When a congregation closes, it's a loss for the entire church. Showing up to help bear that grief is the body of Christ at its best.



**“BEARING GRIEF
TOGETHER IS THE
BODY OF CHRIST AT
ITS BEST.”**

Offer pastoral care to the elders, who are particularly vulnerable in a time of closing. Congregation closures overwhelmingly displace more elders than any other age group. These are the people who, years ago, were the desired demographic: young, with energy and children. But now, when they are frail and tired, they must find a new church home, leave lifelong friends, and have their funerals in a church other than the one they have faithfully stewarded for years. Homebound members, who are not likely to find new churches, are especially vulnerable to being left behind. In consultation with the closing pastor, colleagues can add homebound members to their own visitation rounds. They can agree to officiate funerals for a specified amount of time or until new church homes are found. Churches can provide space for occasional reunions of those who have been scattered by the closure. Our elders carry the church's history and story in their bones. In tending to their pastoral care needs, the wider church acknowledges and honors their years of faithful service.

If social scientists are correct about the current dramatic decline in traditional U.S. church membership, then we are going to close many more churches in the future. We would do well to get out in front of this reality, hone our skills of accompaniment, and acknowledge that when a congregation closes—or dies—that loss is shared by the entire church. ❖

Susan R. Masters is a Lutheran pastor in Minneapolis.

TRAUMA AND THE VOTE

3



In early March, as part of a weekend of events in Selma, Ala., to commemorate the 55th anniversary of “Bloody Sunday,” MSNBC’s Joy Reid and DNR Studios’ Mark Thompson moderated conversations with presidential candidates. When Elizabeth Warren took the stage, the racially mixed audience roared, many attendees holding signs in the air that read “Warren for President.”

Many black women activists, advocates, and leaders endorsed Warren early in the race for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. Black Womxn For, a coalition of more than 100 black women influencers, endorsed her in late 2019. I endorsed her in February 2020, as did Black Lives Matter co-founders Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors. At the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, the premiere annual gathering of justice-minded black clergy, her name buzzed in hallways and around

**“IN THE MIDDLE OF TERROR,
DREAMING BECOMES NEARLY
IMPOSSIBLE.”**

dinner tables. She had listened deeply to the African American community and many other marginalized communities, and the result was a deeply intersectional platform.

So, when Super Tuesday came, I was hopeful that black women across the South would go to the polls with enthusiasm for Warren. But overall, they didn't. Joe Biden won the black vote throughout the South. What happened?

Our nation has absorbed more trauma than we realized, especially Southern people of African descent. Since 2016, voting rights have been suppressed and stripped to degrees not seen since Jim Crow. White nationalist judges have streamed into our court system, pushing aside legal precedents for the protection of civil rights. Prosecutors are finding ways to hold more black people in for-profit jails and prisons, while black people outside prison walls absorb overt white supremacist microaggressions and worse at Starbucks, hotels, supermarkets, and picnics in the park. Nowhere is safe.

We are wounded. And black people are terrorized. In the middle of terror, dreaming becomes nearly impossible. A person has one goal: Make it stop.

Perhaps in normal times black voters would risk a Warren vote. But here's the calculus Southern black families had to consider: For them, the results of this election will mean life or death. They know that white women tipped the 2016 election into the hands of Donald Trump, that they did not vote for one of their own.

I weep for America—but not because Warren will not be our candidate. We will miss her sharp mind and intersectional platform, but my tears flow from a deeper place. I weep for our pain and pray for our healing. ✕

Lisa Sharon Harper is president of FreedomRoad.us and the author of several books, including the forthcoming *Fortune*, the story of her family and a call for reparations.



Develop your passion for God's justice and peace. Discover options from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary!

SEEK THE PEACE OF THE CITY

Study theology and practice transformative peacebuilding in the **Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies** program. Explore a variety of internships. Consider an optional concentration in **Environmental Sustainability Leadership**.

WANT TO STUDY AT A DISTANCE? AMBS has degrees for fully-online or distance learning.

GENEROUS NEED-BASED AID IS AVAILABLE.

LIFELONG LEARNING • NON-DEGREE

Give seminary a try: Take a short course!

Online • No exams or papers • Only six weeks

COMING UP: Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication. April 15 – May 26

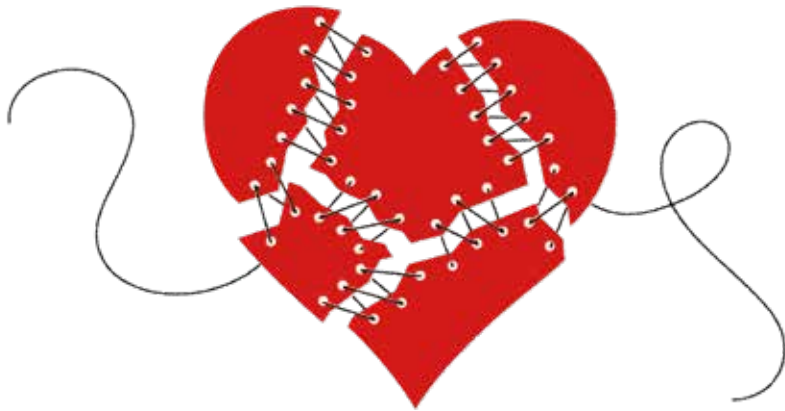
LEARN MORE: ambs.edu/grow

Elkhart, Indiana • Rooted in the Word, Growing in Christ

THE HUNGRY SPIRIT

BY ROSE MARIE BERGER

THERE'S NOTHING PRO-LIFE ABOUT TRUMP



W

White Christian voters—evangelicals, but also Catholics—pushed Trump over the finish line in the 2016 election. Trump regularly holds court in the media with evangelicals but has been less overt with Catholics. That is until January, when he favored some with a personal appearance at the annual March for Life on the national Mall, held in protest of the 1973

Supreme Court decision that overturned state bans on abortion.

“Catholics were of secondary importance to the Trump campaign in 2016, behind evangelicals. That hasn’t changed, but there is at least an effort to reach this community now,” former Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.) told *Politico* in January.

As a Catholic, I’m deeply troubled by this president. Trump stands against everything I’ve been taught to believe.

Pope Francis has prioritized the climate crisis for Catholics; Trump withdrew from the Paris accords and dismantled the modest advances made under Obama.

Pope Francis says welcoming migrants builds a strong social ethic; Trump implements policies that tear apart families and imprison migrant children.

Catholics believe in promoting a consistent moral stance that allows life to flourish. Under the Trump administration average life expectancy in the U.S. has been on the decline for three consecutive years (representing the longest consecutive decline in the American lifespan since World War I).

Pope Francis teaches that the death penalty is no longer permissible under any circumstance; Trump’s attorney general reinstated the federal death penalty, executing prisoners for the first time in nearly two decades.

Though Obama left a shameful legacy of drone strikes involving civilian deaths, under Trump drone strikes have *risen* and so have civilian deaths.

During the 2015 campaign, Trump told *Fox & Friends*, “When you get these terrorists, you have to take out their families.” When Trump took office, he dismantled the few drone-strike reforms Obama had put into place. In 2018, while Trump was reviewing video of a drone strike in Syria, he asked a CIA official why they didn’t just kill the terrorist’s whole family.

Nuclear weapons are one of the gravest threats to human life. In 2019, Pope Francis began teaching that it is immoral for nations to possess nuclear weapons; he urged Catholics to withdraw support from nuclear national security systems. Not only is the Trump administration expanding the nuclear weapons arsenal, it confirmed in February that for the first time “low-yield” nuclear warheads have been deployed on U.S. submarines, perpetuating the grievous fallacy that it’s possible to “win” a nuclear war.

Let’s be clear: There is nothing “pro-life” about President Trump. His weaponization of whiteness, “pussy-grabbing” tendencies, vicious racism, and all-out assault on America’s working poor stand in stark contradiction to the “culture of life” that Catholics embrace.

But isn’t abortion the apex issue for Catholics? The 650,000 medically induced abortions in the U.S. each year certainly make this a key issue for all Christians. But no—abortion is not the paramount social issue for Catholics. It must be held alongside realities such as the fact that the U.S. has the highest “first-day death rate” for newborns in the industrialized world. The whole point of a “consistent ethic of life,” a “seamless garment,” as Cardinal Joseph Bernardin framed it in 1983, is that we must see, judge, and act with prudence on a complex array of social issues.

The danger of single-issue supremacy, says Cardinal Blasé Cupich, is that it may “fragment our Catholic social teaching, pretending to offer so-called non-negotiables, which end up reducing our moral tradition to a single set of issues.” Inevitably, “single issues” get hijacked by forces with vastly different goals. Christians who seek to form their conscience in social ethics today must resist partisan distortion and advance a generative, trustworthy, and respectful culture of life—for all. ✦

Rose Marie Berger is senior associate editor of *Sojourners*, a Catholic poet, and author of *Bending the Arch*.



WHEN NORMALCY RETURNS

For Christians, and really for all humans, the particular horror of the coronavirus is that the best way to help is to separate from others. Unlike almost every other natural disaster, where our species' instinct and our theological directive is to love our neighbors, our job in the pandemic is to separate ourselves. Don't lay on hands: wash them. Don't give a lingering, loving hug: stand at least six feet away making awkward gestures. The college where I work quickly sent its students home, so there's not even the satisfaction of seeing them: Instead, we're now engaged in something called "remote learning."

If there is a grace here amid the very real suffering, it's that we're also being asked to go a little quiet—to reduce our busyness, to sequester ourselves in our homes. And for a society that's been lately marked by an almost obsessive over-achievement, a society whose wealthiest

members boast not of their leisure but of their workaholicism, that's full of interesting possibilities. Here are some of the things I've been reflecting on.

One, the physical world is very real. We spend our days staring into screens, so it's easy to forget that we live on a planet where biology—in the form of a tiny microbe—can upend every facet of life. I know this to be true because I spend my life working on climate change, the much larger crisis that grips our planet. But day to day even I tend to forget just how real physics and chemistry—the driving forces of global warming—really are. In a created world, physical reality is the bottom line. It can't be spun—in fact, the absurd efforts of President Trump to do just that seem finally to have revealed his imperial lack of clothing to many more Americans.

Two, "social distancing" doesn't feel quite as odd as perhaps it should. We're already in much less contact with our fellow humans than most of our ancestors—surveys show steep declines in recent decades in the number of close friends for the average American. The hyper-individualism that undergirds our economy undercuts our faith: It's hard to love your neighbors if you don't know them. Maybe, just maybe, this stretch of isolation will make us think longer and harder about our daily lives in ordinary time: When we're released from this strange interlude, maybe we won't simply return to our ingrained habits, but make a conscious effort to reach out to those around us.

The day will come when we can easily return to church, to the store, to the hairdresser—for that we will be able to thank the scientists, and the brave doctors and nurses, who did what they had to do during this emergency. But their courage will have been wasted if nothing deeper changes in how we treat one another and the planet. *

**"WHEN WE'RE
 RELEASED FROM THIS
 STRANGE INTERLUDE,
 MAYBE WE WON'T
 SIMPLY RETURN TO
 OUR INGRAINED
 HABITS."**

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, is the author most recently of *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*

EYEWITNESS

4



**"WHEN PEOPLE ARE
MURDERED, THE
SPACE SHOULD BE
SACRED GROUND."**

WHEN BLOOD CRIES OUT, HOW DO WE ANSWER?

"My brother was killed in 2007, and I watched my mom avoid that area for years. When there's a space where someone has been murdered, you can feel the toxic energy in that space. And I realized there are these toxic holes being left around Baltimore, and it shouldn't be that way. When people are murdered, the space should be sacred ground—where they lost their lives to violence. Just like the Bible talks about the blood crying out from the ground when Cain killed Abel, when blood cries out we should show up to answer with love and with light, honoring that person.

We ask people facilitating rituals to show up with love in their body. Grief is okay, some sadness is okay, but mostly a feeling of joy at how much this person meant to the world, love for the neighborhood, and compassion for their family and loved ones.

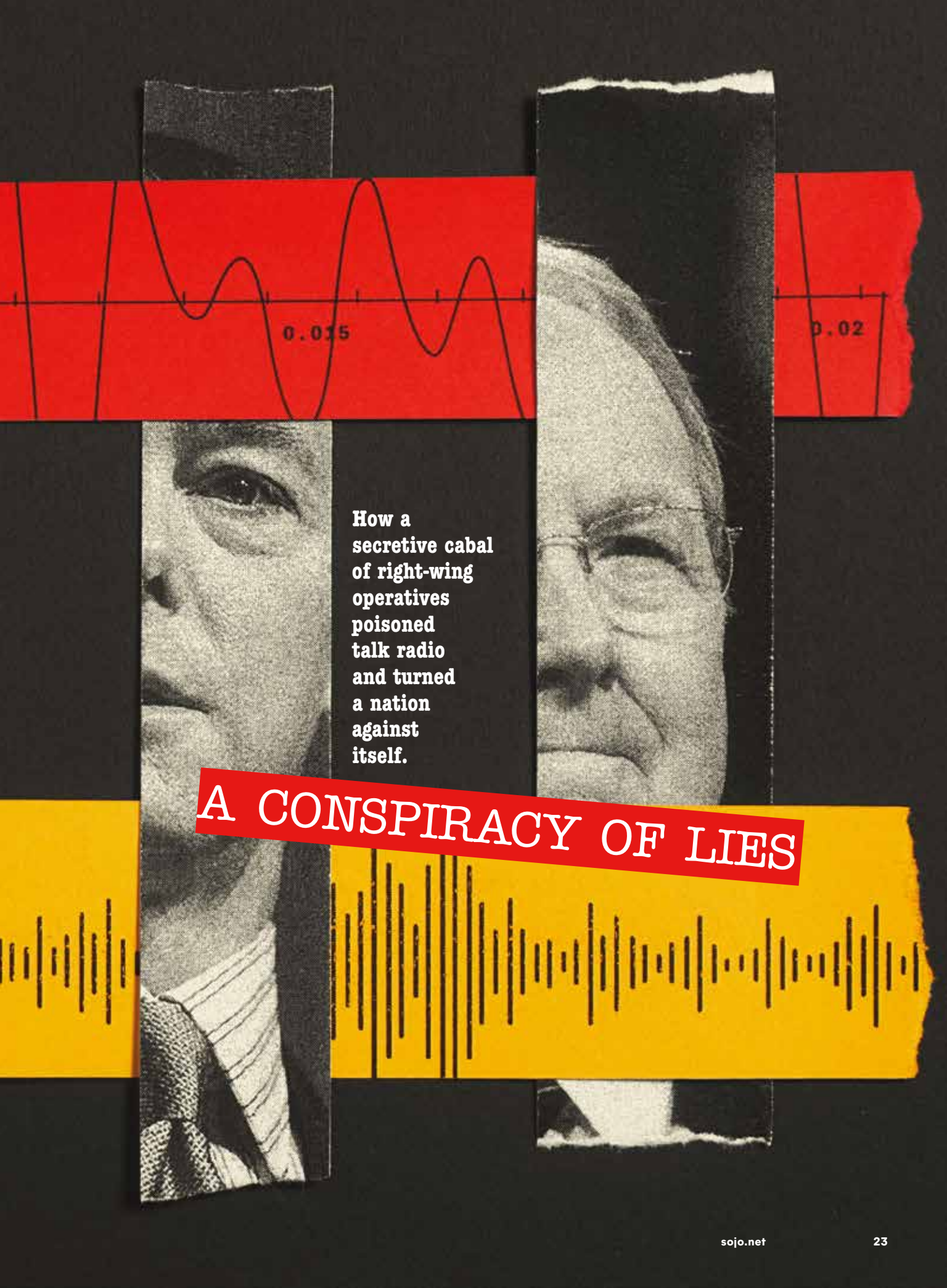
When we get to the neighborhood, we burn sage along the entire block where the murder happened. We talk to people who live there, let them know what we plan to do, and ask if they can show us exactly the spot where the person was killed. At the spot, sometimes people play music, sing songs, hold hands, and say a lot of positive things.

I get down on the ground with my palms on the concrete and I speak to the soul of the person, apologizing to them for our part in helping to create a world that's this violent. I tell them that they still matter to us, that we're going to take them with us on every step of our journey. I ask them to fight for us on the other side." ❖

Erricka Bridgeford is co-founder and co-organizer of Baltimore Ceasefire 365. She spoke with *Sojourners* associate editor Betsy Shirley about the sacred rituals Ceasefire holds at the site of every murder in Baltimore.

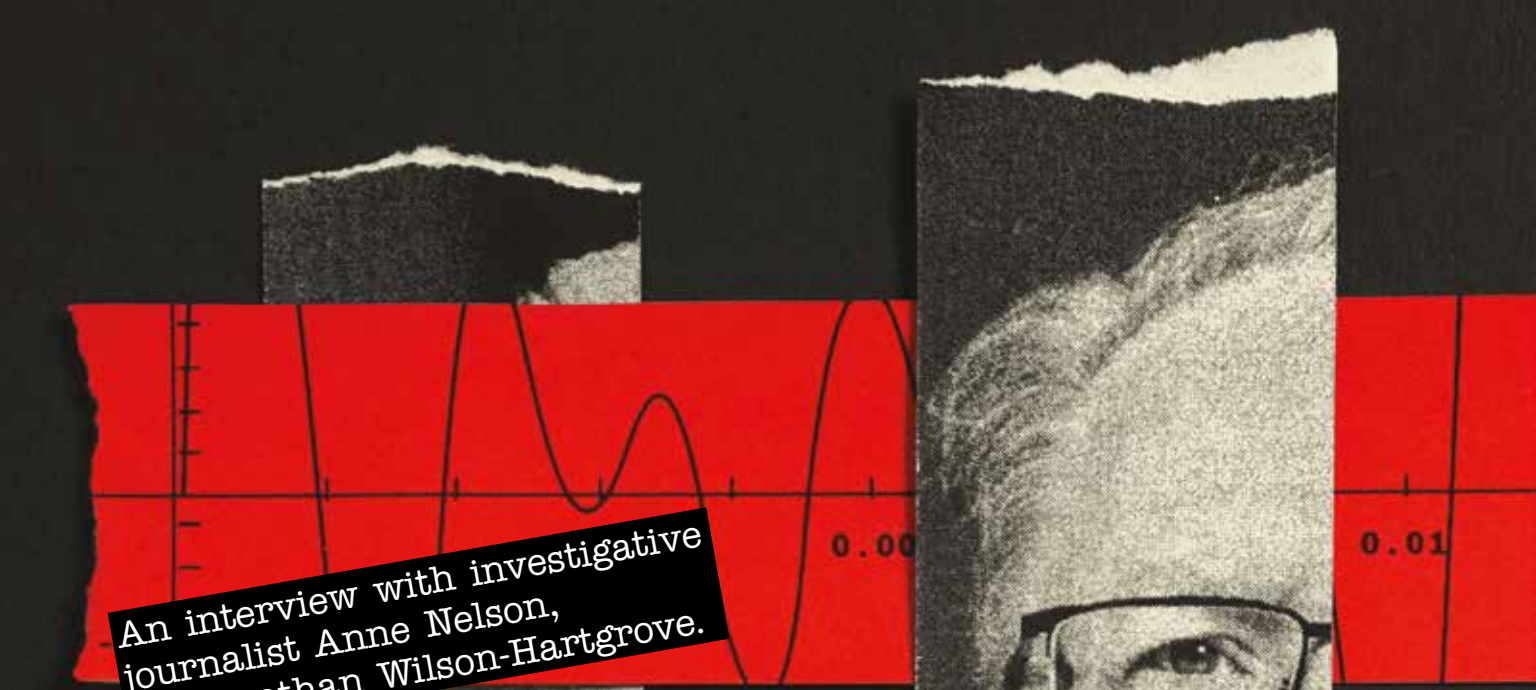






How a
secretive cabal
of right-wing
operatives
poisoned
talk radio
and turned
a nation
against
itself.

A CONSPIRACY OF LIES



An interview with investigative journalist Anne Nelson, by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove.

A

Anne Nelson is a child of Stillwater, Okla. Though she left home to attend Yale University, traveled as a reporter to Central America in the 1980s, and has lived in New York City for four decades, Nelson stays connected to her hometown.

In 2004, while visiting family back in Oklahoma, she noticed something about the conversations on talk radio as she drove across town. People in Oklahoma were not simply processing the news through different filters than her neighbors in New York City. They were getting different news—a whole different story about what was supposedly *really* happening in America. A good reporter, Nelson wanted to know why.

Her research led her to a group called the Council for National Policy. Founded in 1981 by extreme conservatives who cut their teeth in right-wing politics and the struggle for power within the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1970s, this little-known network brought together Republican political operatives and preachers of the new Religious Right with independent radio and media companies. In the words of Richard DeVos, a longtime member, the CNP became a coordinating committee for the “donors and the doers” of reactionary right-wing politics. A strange conversation on talk radio led Nelson into the inner workings of an elite network that has labored for four decades to convince everyday Americans in the heartland that they cannot trust East Coast “elites.”

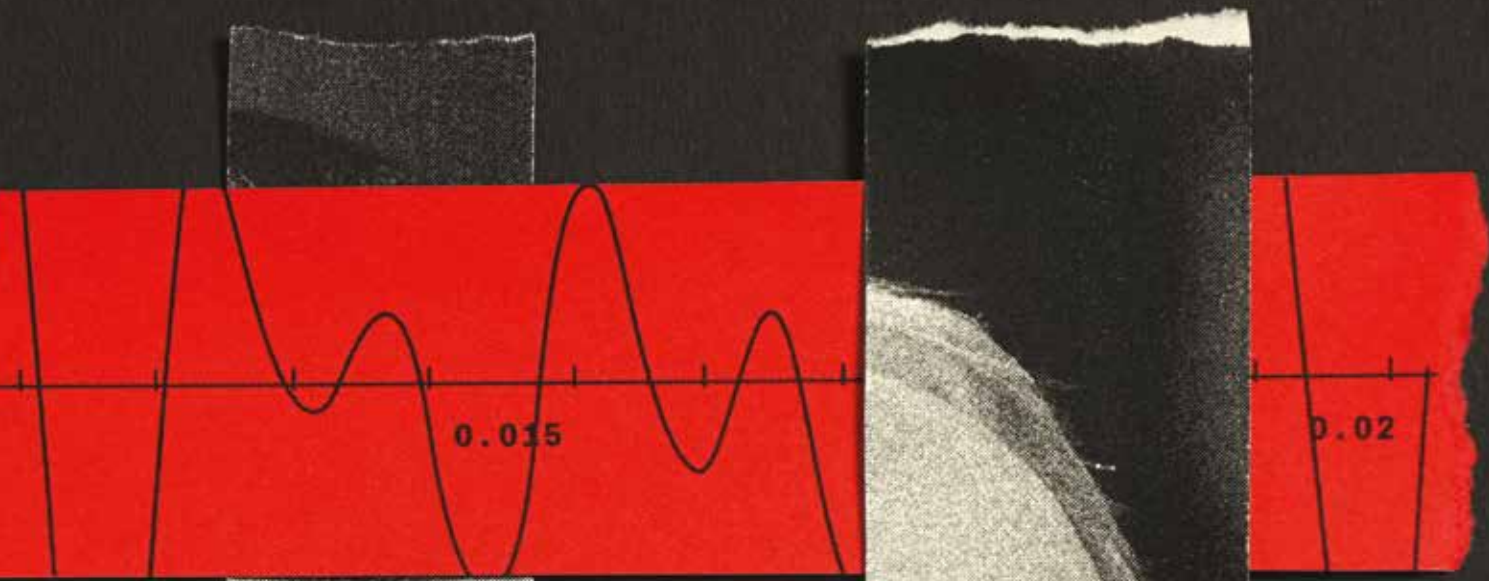
In Nelson’s recent book *Shadow Network: Media, Money, and the Secret Hub of the Radical Right*, the longtime professor

at Columbia University’s School of Journalism and School of International and Public Affairs invites readers to see what’s happening in the United States today as a product of the propaganda that CNP produces. Anyone who has been confounded by the willingness of some Christians to march in lockstep with Donald Trump and the Republican Party through the personal scandals and political controversies of the past four years would benefit from placing a list of the characters from Nelson’s new book beside their daily news source. People who have defended Trump from the White House—Steve Bannon, Mike Pence, Kellyanne Conway—have in fact been connected through the CNP for decades to the white evangelicals—James Dobson, Tony Perkins, and Ralph Reed among them—who have been most eager to praise Trump as a champion of “religious values.” On the same list, less recognizable names point to radio and television networks that offer an alternative story to the fact-based journalism Trump and his enablers attack as “fake news,” to the data companies that empower targeted political organizing, and to the money that makes all of this possible.

Critical books in recent years, such as Jane Mayer’s *Dark Money* and Nancy MacLean’s *Democracy in Chains*, have uncovered the influence of big money in efforts to undermine American democracy. But in an era of the most extreme inequality since the Gilded Age, how do oil-rich plutocrats persuade everyday Americans that someone like Donald Trump represents a populist agenda? The answer to that question has everything to do with the way Christian values have been reframed in American public life by members of the CNP over the past 40 years.

As a growing movement of Christians organizes to challenge the Religious Right, *Shadow Network* is an important resource. Nelson, who is herself a member of the Episcopal Church, sat down with me to talk about how her research can inform faith-rooted organizing to reclaim democracy for the common good. —JWH

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a *Sojourners* contributing editor, is the author most recently of *Revolution of Values: Reclaiming Public Faith for the Common Good* (IVP).



Right-wing talk radio, reinforced by fundamentalist TV broadcasters, often uses religious programming to make political points, without even pretending to offer fact-based reporting.

Previous pages,
from left:
Paul Weyrich,
Wayne LaPierre,
Ralph Reed, and
James Dobson.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove: As an investigative reporter, you've written a book that takes readers into the heart of the institutional network that connects the Religious Right to the NRA, the Federalist Society, right-wing media, and the Republican Party. It's a wild ride. What got you started on the path that made it possible for you to write this book?

Anne Nelson: I wrote *Shadow Network* out of a sense of civic duty. I observed some trends in our national life that were anti-democratic and detrimental to our public welfare. I'm deeply concerned by the epidemic of gun violence in our schools, the growing disdain for science and fact-based reporting, and, gravest of all, the campaigns against climate science and environmental protections. My research gave me some insight into the underlying mechanics that achieved these measures, and I dropped my other projects in 2016 to document them in this book.

As someone raised in the Southern Baptist church, I was struck by the way you see so much of the extremism in American life today rooted in the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1970s. Why was that struggle within America's largest Protestant denomination so important to what would follow in public life? It is indeed extraordinary that individuals connected to the Southern Baptist Convention should play such an outsized role in our national life. I see three major factors. The first is that, over a period when mainline Protestant denominations were shrinking in membership and influence,

the Southern Baptist Convention was growing and exerting increasing influence over other evangelical sects.

The second is that the Southern Baptist Convention is extremely well represented in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana, which, combined, amount to a virtual petro-state in terms of the oil industry's sway over economic and political life, and there's been a symbiotic relationship between the Baptists and the oil interests of the region.

Third, the Southern Baptist Convention was founded to defend slaveowners before the Civil War. I don't see the issue of race playing out in the same way, but I do perceive many echoes of Civil War-era resentment of federal authority in its culture.

Same here. Not least in the ways this movement has focused on "state's rights." Paul Weyrich, the key organizer of the Council for National Policy (CNP) in its beginnings, saw the importance of state governments to his goal of subverting representational democracy. What has this movement done in statehouses to ensure its agenda can move forward without popular support? The movement I describe in *Shadow Network* has devoted major resources and energy to winning state-level elections, including state legislatures. It is common for them to pilot bills in certain states, to leverage them to others through organizations such as the State Policy Network and the American Legislative Exchange Council. That's one reason we're seeing so many "copycat" bills in areas such as limiting women's reproductive rights and gun control.

I noticed when Russian agent Maria Butina was arrested, people were asking why she had so many connections with both the NRA and the Religious Right. Short answer: The CNP. Can you talk about the NRA and the role it plays in the CNP?

Wayne LaPierre, the CEO of the National Rifle Association, is a leading member of the Council for National Policy. The NRA claims some 5 million members and mobilizes them in the interests of the CNP's agenda. The NRA's Institute for Legislative Action is the organization's lobbying arm. Its cellphone app uses the Koch brothers' data platform i360 to mobilize and equip members to conduct Get Out the Vote campaigns for gun rights supporters, to lobby local and national government officials, and conduct door-to-door canvassing in electoral campaigns. The app's geofencing capability convenes NRA supporters for social interactions in gun shops and other locales.

I learned a great deal from your book about the digital tools that political campaigns are using to connect with voters. Why are the data wars so important to the struggle for democracy in this moment?

The extensive use of Big Data in political campaigns is barely a decade old, yet it has transformed our national landscape. It allows campaigns to target and try to activate voters who are likely to support their candidates. All sides are using it. The serious problems arise when the campaigns use their targeted messaging and platforms to circulate falsehoods—such as the idea that Democrats endorse “executing newborns.” They don’t. But Big Data targeting, combined with wallpaper media, can convince people to neglect important issues such as health care and the national debt while they’re bombarded with messaging on nonexistent phenomena.

You write about this “wallpaper effect” of multiple media sources that constantly reinforce a distorted narrative, and even outright lies. What made this propaganda machine possible? Do you see any effective ways to counter its influence in 2020?

When I travel to the Midwest and the Southwest to see family and friends, I’ve found that the region is blanketed by conservative fundamentalist and right-wing talk radio, which presents a distorted, one-sided, and often fallacious version of current events. These outlets often use

religious programming to make political points, without even pretending to offer fact-based reporting. Their influence is reinforced by fundamentalist television broadcasters such as the Christian Broadcasting Network and the Trinity Broadcasting Network, as well as Fox News and local Sinclair stations.

Council for National Policy affiliates such as the Family Research Council influence pastors through groups such as Watchmen on the Wall, which claims a membership of more than 70,000 pastors nationwide. These pastors are equipped with voter guides to insert in the church bulletins, videos to project in their sanctuaries, and even downloadable sermons to deliver. In some communities, citizens are surrounded by content from these sources—at a time when local newspapers and other sources of professional journalism are struggling to survive.

For a long time, the consensus in progressive faith communities was that the Religious Right was like the KKK in the South—a lamentable vestige of the past that was best ignored. Young people could see through the lies, so we thought it best to ignore the liars until those young people became a majority.



But youth outreach has become a huge focus of CNP organizing. Are they recruiting a new generation of followers?

After several years of intense research, I believe the Religious Right is driven by economic interests. The political operatives have conducted focus groups and polling to identify hot button issues and framing language (such as “partial birth abortion,” which doesn’t exist as a medical term). Then they manipulate people to support candidates who work against their interests once they take office—cutting corporate taxes, then slashing budgets for public education, public health, environmental protections, and public infrastructure. I see it as an ingenious shell game.

That said, the affiliates of the Council for National Policy are aware that trends in national demographics are not in their favor—the U.S. is becoming more racially diverse; younger generations are more socially liberal than their elders. That’s why they’re trying to move quickly in appointing judges to the federal courts and spending big money on recruiting students and young professionals.

Many people of faith who’ve watched the Religious Right and right-wing media hijack our language are weary of pol-

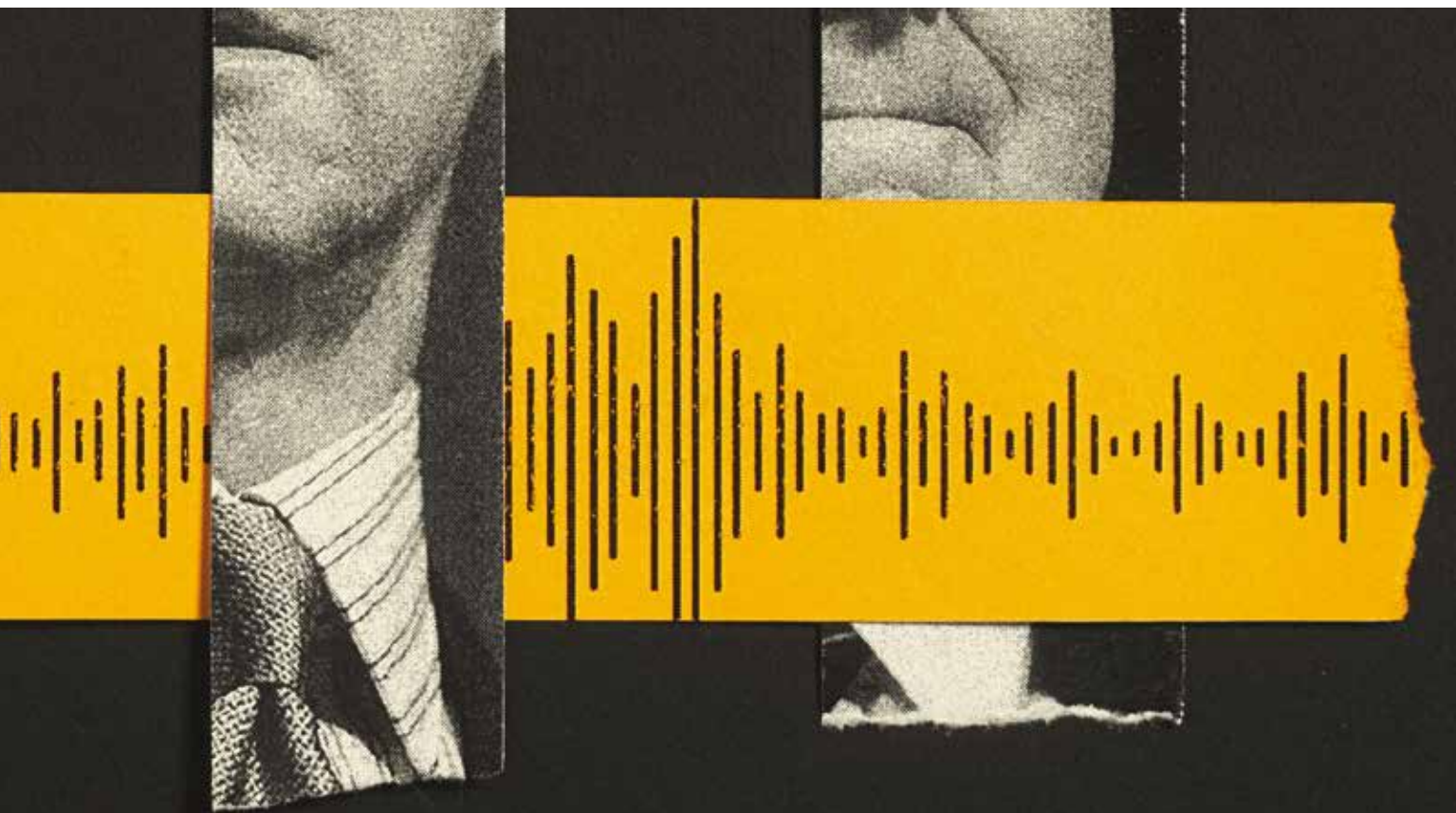
People in Oklahoma were not simply processing the news through different filters. They were getting a whole different story.

itics. It feels like our most sacred values have been used as tools. What would you say to folks who feel burned by all of this about why it’s important to stay engaged—to expose and challenge the shadow network you’ve described?

My last two books, *Red Orchestra* and *Suzanne’s Children*, recounted the stories of resistance movements in Nazi-era Berlin and Occupied Paris. I learned that most of the population in Germany and France was passive; it was natural to look the other way as human rights abuses occurred, and care for oneself and one’s family.

But there were others—many of them Protestants and Catholics—who chose to take a stand and follow the tenets of their faith. Some are well-known, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer; others less so, such as Pastor Paul Vergara in Paris, who helped to rescue hundreds of immigrant Jewish children from detention and deportation.

There are moments in history when people of faith must ask what their faith instructs them to do. I have been deeply moved by a recent trip to Israel, when I visited Nazareth and swam in the beautiful Sea of Galilee. It was a green and pleasant land, and I reflected on how Jesus could have had a perfectly lovely life in his village minding his own business. But he didn’t. ♦





**Embedded
in Berlin's streets,
the memorials to
individual Holocaust
victims destabilized
me—and my faith in
a god of safety.**



By Ali Tranvik

THE STONES CRY OUT

I am terrified of tripping. Thanks to a couple memorable tumbles over the years—the most recent of which involved a face-plant while on a run—I always double-knot my shoelaces and look down at my feet when I walk. Remaining steady and stable is always in the back of my mind.

But on a trip to Berlin in 2017, I found myself repeatedly tripping over something in the ground. The source of my stumbling, I soon learned, were *Stolpersteine*, which translates literally to “stumbling stones,” or more metaphorically, “stumbling blocks.” *Stolpersteine* are cobblestone-sized bronze plaques embedded in streets and sidewalks throughout Europe, each slightly raised above ground level and engraved with the name and life dates of a Holocaust victim, including murdered Jews, members of the LGBTQ+ community, Sinti and Roma people, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, and other ethnic and political minorities.

These commemorative stones are part of an ongoing art project, installed at the last place each person lived or worked before falling victim to Nazi crimes. Above each engraved name are the words “*hier wohnte*,” or “here lived,” serving as a reminder that this person did not build their life just anywhere, but right *here*. Each day they walked on *this* ground.

Each is unique

The idea for Stolpersteine began in 1991, when artist Gunter Demnig painted a white line through the streets of Cologne to trace the deportation of 1,000 Sinti and Roma who were forced out of the city just 50 years prior. “An old lady stopped by and scolded my work, insisting there had never been any Gypsies in Cologne,” said Demnig. Her denial prompted Demnig to find a way to more permanently preserve the memory of those killed in the Holocaust.

After he installed 200 plaques in Cologne, Demnig’s project—initially intended as a one-off piece—quickly became the biggest of his career. Today, more than 75,000 Stolpersteine are found in nearly 2,000 European cities and towns. While the memorial continues to grow, Demnig refuses to mass produce Stolpersteine, crafting each one by hand with a small team of artists. This is in “direct opposition to the Nazis’ mass extermination policies,” explains the project’s website. Each Stolperstein is individually sculpted, inscribed, and installed. Each is unique.

Unlike Berlin’s iconic Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which features 2,711 large concrete slabs on a nearly five-acre site in Berlin’s city center, Stolpersteine was not something I had planned to visit. Created as “decentralized” memorials, they are encountered unexpectedly. While some find the possibility of accidentally trampling on the names of Holocaust victims blasphemous, Demnig said “it goes beyond our comprehension to understand the killing of 6 million Jews, but if you read the name of one person, calculate his age, look at his old home, and wonder behind which window he used to live, then the horror has a face to it.”

One morning while walking along a row of picturesque homes in the Kreuzberg neighborhood, I noticed a small grouping of four Stolpersteine. I stopped and looked closer: the Rosenberg family. A mother, father, and their two sons, I surmised from the inscriptions. While names and dates could not convey the fullness of who the Rosenbergs were, their unexpected intrusion into my stroll stopped me from reducing them to broad, sanitized statistics, or from remembering the Holocaust solely for its inconceivable enormity. Instead, these Stolpersteine—and the dozens of others I stumbled upon—reminded me that the Holocaust was a murder of particular people in particular places.

My double-knots were useless when it came to walking steadily in Berlin. Stolpersteine made it so that I could not casually pass history by—I was interrupted, forced to question the levelness of the ground on which I stood, made to stumble upon what would be far easier if avoided, forgotten, or transcended.

Dangerous quietism

Faith, I had always believed, meant having firm footing, stability, security, a solid foundation. Faith meant building my house on the rock (Matthew 7:24-27), walking with double-knotted shoelaces in a world full of bumps and cracks.

But as I walked through Berlin, I could not help but stumble over the horrifying history of the Holocaust. Even

more destabilizing was the fact that many of my fellow Lutherans were shamefully complicit with a regime that murdered millions of people. During my time in Berlin, I learned that many Lutherans vocally endorsed the Nazi regime, such as German Lutheran pastor Siegfried Leffler, who wrote in 1935, “In the person of the Führer we see the one God has sent, who sets Germany before the Lord of history, who calls us from the worship of words, from the cult of the Pharisees and the Levites, to the holy service of the Samaritan.” Other Lutherans simply stood by in silence.

I learned that the story I like to tell of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor who was murdered for his resistance to the Nazi regime, was an astonishing exception to the church’s quietist status quo. I read the text that Martin Luther wrote titled *On the Jews and Their Lies*, which recommended “set[ting] fire to synagogues [and Jewish] schools.” I learned that it was on the eve of Luther’s birthday when, in 1938, Nazis began their most public and devastating act of terror yet, 48 hours of burning and looting synagogues across Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in what became known as *Kristallnacht*, or “The Night of Broken Glass.”

I suspect my Lutheran ancestors who lived during the Holocaust thought of themselves as devout people of faith. They went to church, read the Bible, cared for their families, and would help their neighbors in times of need—provided that first their own house was in order. But as chaos unfolded around them, they turned inward, enclosing themselves within a facade of security. At best, they practiced a dangerous quietism that allowed them to do nothing as their neighbors were forcibly removed from their homes, separated from their families, or deported to concentration camps. At worst, they preemptively got rid of any “outsiders” perceived to be a threat and joined in horrific national projects promising a return to long-lost greatness.

A mighty fortress?

As I stumbled over Stolpersteine, I reflected on my own double-knotted faith. It was a faith that resembles that of the “Good Germans,” Lutherans who, like me, clung to a sense of security and searched for solid ground but wound up building a mighty fortress—and calling it God’s house.

Stolpersteine exposed the dangers of the safe and comfortable faith I had long held dear. They helped me see that while I profess neighborly love, my faith is more focused on my own well-being than that of my neighbors. While it’s easier to blame the injustice around me on the president or those in power I disagree with, I too am complicit. I attend meetings with city leaders to lament and discuss the recent housing crisis in my community in which hundreds of families were displaced from a public housing complex due to unsafe living conditions, while pretending that gets me off the hook for doing the much more costly work of listening to and being in relationship with those affected. I get into the pulpit and denounce the injustice of kids in cages in ICE detention facilities while saying little about the adults in cages at the prison across town. I’d rather donate to the local food drive than do the more inconvenient work of sitting down to break bread



WALKING FAITHFULLY MEANS FALLING TO MY KNEES.

with my hungry neighbors. I write this article critiquing a risk-averse faith that makes a god out of safety to justify not taking actual risks for my neighbors in need.

To be clear, safety itself is not the problem. Some sense of safety and security is critical, particularly for those who have endured trauma. Rather, safety becomes dangerous when it is made into a god, taking precedence over all else—something far too prevalent within a religion of whiteness.

Stolpersteine unsettle my belief in this false faith. They force me to reflect on the grave consequences of building a “solid” foundation and calling it holy ground.

While I’d prefer to think of faith as something steady and safe, tripping over Stolpersteine taught me that real faith necessarily entails stumbling. It involves risk. It entails being off-balance, falling down, skinning my knees, even breaking my bones. From my vantage point there on the ground, I’ll begin to see more clearly the suffering my double-knotted walk in the world has perpetuated. It’s only once I’m on the ground too that I can truly see the neighbors I’ve cast to the edges of my well-manicured paths.

Look around

What does it mean to walk faithfully through the world? For me, it means paying attention to Stolpersteine or other public art that trips me up. Walking faithfully means falling to my knees to confess and repent of my sin of believing that my own security is more urgent than my neighbor’s needs. It means more forcefully denouncing the president’s hateful anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-black rhetoric from the pulpit, a stance that was woefully absent in most sermons of my clergy forebears in Nazi Germany.

For me as a Lutheran, it also means crafting a service of repentance for Reformation Sunday, confessing the sins (of both omission and commission) of Lutherans past and present. It means examining the particular ground

on which I stand. The *Grabe wo du stehst* (“dig where you stand”) movement, rooted in labor history, reached a high point in the 1980s when Germans began to uncover their own local and familial connections to the Holocaust. Since returning from Germany, I’ve begun to recognize that the ground on which my home and church dwell is also blood-soaked land, stolen from the Catawba and Shakori tribes of what is now called North Carolina. Stories of violence and genocide exist here, too. We just don’t have Stolpersteine to mark them.

Or maybe faith simply means to stop looking *down* and start looking *around* as I walk through the world. To risk actually seeing those around me whose suffering I’d rather ignore. To risk getting on the ground with them.

When we walk through the world with our eyes on our neighbors rather than our own feet, we will surely stumble. But stumbling isn’t unfaithful. God became incarnate to stumble along this bumpy road with us and gave us something far greater than the false sense of security Christians have so often sought: radical grace and love. This frees us to loosen our laces. It frees us to walk this uneven ground together, to run to our neighbors in need, to dance with one another in the crumbling streets. ❖

Ali Tranvik is the Lutheran campus pastor at Duke University in Durham, N.C. She traveled to Germany and Poland through the Fellowships at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics.





Touching the wounds of the world. We think of Thomas as the one who doubted, but his story shows us how to believe.

By Robyn Henderson-Espinoza

Last year I went on my first cruise. Joined by my favorite kinfolk, I caught up on my rest, sampled craft beer, and enjoyed some really great food. As the boat made its way to the Caribbean and Cayman Islands, I attended a performance by Delta Rae, a rock and folk band with Southern roots and a flair for storytelling. I was moved by many of the songs they performed that night, but it was their song “Hands Dirty” that stayed with me long after we disembarked.

The song gives voice to a woman who, like many in the service industry, works hard but doesn't catch a break. In the chorus, vocalists Brittany Hölljes and Liz Hopkins sing:

*I get my hands dirty
I show up so early
They show me no mercy
So I just keep working
Maybe God could save me*

In this song I heard someone whose work had never been recognized. I heard echoes of all the ways our society has continually undervalued women's labor—especially the labor of women of color, who are disproportionately marginalized in the workforce. Yet even as this woman experienced the sharp end of capitalism's stick, the song made it clear she wasn't giving up; she was going to keep working, imagining the future could be different. And as I listened, I thought: Isn't that our work right now—to get our hands dirty? To imagine a different way of being and becoming, take a leap of faith, dig deep, and roll up our sleeves? And, if that is our work, do we have the courage to do it?

Firsthand experience

A few months ago, I came across a photograph on Instagram based on Caravaggio's famous painting "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas." In Caravaggio's painting, the disciple Thomas is depicted reaching into the flesh of Jesus, sinking his hands into the broken, yet risen flesh of the Christ. But in the picture I saw on Instagram—the work of Swedish photographer Elisabeth Ohlson—there was a nonbinary transgender person in the place of Jesus and an onlooker's finger probed the scar left by chest surgery, a procedure that allows people to be more aligned with their understanding of their gender.

The story of Jesus' appearance to Thomas in John 20:24-29 is one of my favorites. Most often, we interpret Thomas as the one who doubted—the one who simply refused to believe in what was possible. Then Jesus appears and something in Thomas changes; he is renewed by touching the wounds of the Risen Christ.

But I see Thomas as someone who took a risk and plunged his hands into Jesus' broken flesh. The word in the story of Thomas that is usually understood as doubt comes from the Greek *apistis*, with *a-* meaning the negation of something and *pistis* meaning belief or believing. So according to John's gospel, Thomas wasn't *doubting*, he was *not believing*. To many folks, "doubting" and "not believing"

sound like synonyms, but their meanings are different. Doubt means a lack of certainty or a lack of understanding about something or someone, while "not believing" is the orientation of not having enough data or experience to fully believe. So as I understand this story, when Thomas discovered he couldn't fully believe, he sought out the direct experience he needed to bridge the remaining distance. In other words, Thomas got his hands dirty in order to believe.

What happens when Thomas sinks his fingers into the wounded side of the Risen One? In these few short moments, a kind of transformation occurs; Thomas was changed because of firsthand experience—literally. What Thomas touched with his fingers allowed him to believe. And for today's followers of the Way, this points to an important practice: experience. Without experience of the ongoing realities of injustice around us, such as homelessness (which disproportionately impacts youth and children), or a lack of access to health care (which impacts almost all of us), or any other structures of evil that keep us from fully flourishing, we cannot imagine a different future or even a different now. The story of Thomas reminds us that transformation can occur in the moments when experience and imagination come into contact with one another. In the midst of turmoil and agony, these moments help us forge a different way forward.

Thomas asks to get his hands dirty in the flesh of Jesus before he will consent to believing the Resurrected One. And isn't that our story, too? We don't believe in the seriousness of—or sometimes even the existence of—homelessness, white supremacy, or discriminatory barriers that keep transgender persons from adequate housing, food, and safety until we see for ourselves these things are true. So often it's tempting to think that if something doesn't happen to us directly, it isn't real. And so, like the Thomas figure in Caravaggio's painting and Ohlson's photograph, we need to sink our hands into the woundedness of today's world.

Sinking in

In Charlottesville, Va., in August 2017, I got my hands dirty and was baptized in cans of urine and tear gas.

Standing with other progressive religious folks on the corner of 2nd and Water Streets, wearing khaki shorts, a sleeveless clergy shirt, and my red and yellow protest stole emblazoned with a resistance fist and "Black Lives Matter," I watched violence unfold around us. I had gone to Charlottesville to join a group of clergy who wanted to provide a counterwitness to the white supremacist and neo-Nazi rally happening in the city. As

we stood together, a crowd of at least 200 people yelling disparaging words and chanting neo-Nazi slogans surged in our direction. In response, the security team that was keeping watch over us throughout the protest hustled us into a fenced-in area. As Virginia state police officers stood watching nearby, people who we presumed were neo-Nazis began hurling cans of concrete into our area. Not long after that incident, someone began throwing cans of urine, and the police started using tear gas. I later found out that our hotel had been compromised, and we had to move to a more secure location in the same town.

Before that day, I believed that white supremacy and racism were real, but I didn't really think that kind of hate could be so strong—like Thomas, I didn't fully believe. But after Charlottesville, my body sank into this reality and I truly believed. I could palpably feel evil in the world, and my entire orientation to anti-violence and anti-racism shifted.

I used to think that the structure of supremacy culture (white supremacy, economic supremacy, and militarism) was conceptual, but my firsthand experience in Charlottesville showed me otherwise. Now I work to dismantle all sorts of supremacies that work in tandem with white supremacy, so that we can inhabit the kind of world we long to inhabit. This is not easy work; it requires my daily divestment from the easier route of not believing that violence and hate are real, impacting us all every day. Now I am committed to eradicating supremacy culture from our world, and I have taken a leap of faith and risk in doing so. I see this work as deeply rooted in the ways we relate to one another, how we treat one another, and how these relationships build a future for a better democracy—one that claims equity for all. My time in Charlottesville catalyzed this leap of faith for me. It also required me to seek out tangible ways to build liberative relationships that create conditions for the beloved community to emerge.

These wounds

I think getting our hands dirty is connected to salvation. No, not the eternal life kind of salvation—I'm talking about our salvation from the oppression and hell of today that keeps a noose around all of our necks: things such as racism, unfettered capitalism, a lack of affordable housing, or food insecurities. That kind of salvation doesn't come just from gathering at church, believing in God, or understanding the doctrines of the church; it comes from how we live. And that means we have to change our behavior.

But we can't rely on the current system

It's tempting to think that if it doesn't happen to us directly, it isn't real.

to show us how we need to change. It took the death and resurrection of Jesus for the disciples to get their acts together and actually continue the movement Jesus started. And now it's our job to touch the wounds caused by homelessness, poverty, white supremacy, global capitalism, climate change, the separation of children from their parents at the border, and gentrification—and believe the future can be different.

What might that look like? What might it look like if we took a trip to the border to actually see what's going on there, or read different news sources that give fuller accounts of the immigration battles? What if we surveyed where the grocery stores are in our city or neighborhood and considered where most low-income housing is located? How might we educate ourselves on pressing social concerns that help us believe in deeper ways the pain of those who suffer or don't have housing or access to health care or groceries? What if we actually talked to people on the side of the street who ask for money, and get to know their stories? What happens when we come close to suffering and poverty—close enough that it creates folds of empathy in us that cause us to act differently? That is getting our hands dirty and sinking our hands into the woundedness of this world.

I'll be honest: Like Thomas, I don't always believe. I don't always believe our work will make a difference, and I question our capacity to make the lasting change that can revolutionize our world. But like Thomas, who sunk his hands into the wounds of the Risen One, when I come close to suffering and actually sink my hands into the wounds of this world, I am transformed. I am renewed and come to have hope in a different world, one where the reign of God is made manifest right before my eyes. May you go and do likewise! ♦

Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, Ph.D., founder and co-director of The Activist Theology Project, is a nonbinary transqueer activist, Latinx scholar, and public theologian living and working in the American South. Henderson-Espinoza, who teaches at Duke Divinity School, is author of *Activist Theology* (2019).

GREAT READS/ Books to inform and inspire



Native

Kaitlin B. Curtice
Brazos Press
KaitlinCurtice.com

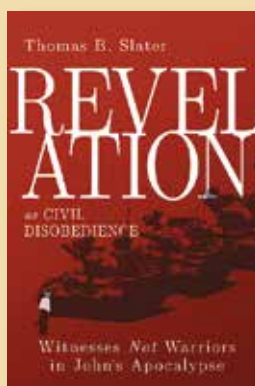
Learn about identity, soul-searching, and the never-ending journey of finding ourselves and finding God. As both a citizen of the Potawatomi Nation and a Christian, Kaitlin Curtice shares what it means to experience her faith through the lens of her heritage and encourages us to embrace our own origins.



The Beginning of Difference: Discovering Identity in God's Diverse World

Theodore Hiebert
Abingdon Press
abingdonpress.com

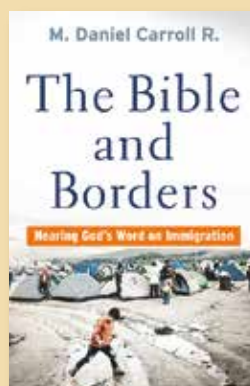
At a time when tensions surround racial and cultural differences, we need to re-examine God's view of diversity. Hiebert explores biblical stories of difference—such as the Tower of Babel—exposing our inclination to interpret these negatively. But difference is God's intention for us; this book provides resources for today.



Revelation as Civil Disobedience: Witnesses Not Warriors in John's Apocalypse

Thomas B. Slater
Abingdon Press
abingdonpress.com

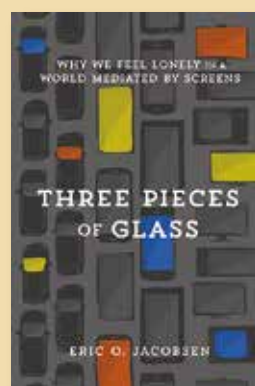
The book of Revelation is a form of civil disobedience that focuses upon sustaining a faithful witness despite the consequences. In Slater's new study of this biblical book, he redefines conquering as sustaining a witness under duress, modeled after the faithfulness of Jesus. Christians overcome evil through faithful witness.



The Bible and Borders

M. Daniel Carroll R.
Brazos Press
Available wherever books are sold

With a worldwide increase in migration, how should Christians respond? M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas) unpacks what the Bible says about immigration in the Old and New Testaments in this accessible, insightful, and nuanced guide.



Three Pieces of Glass

Eric O. Jacobsen
Brazos Press
ThreePiecesOfGlass.com

Loneliness is increasingly affecting our communities. Eric Jacobsen shows how three pieces of glass—the car windshield, TV, and smart-phone—demonstrate how our culture has created a habit of physical isolation. He further explores how four strategies can reconnect our lives to foster community and help alleviate loneliness.



Grace Is a Pre-existing Condition: Faith, Systems, and Mental Healthcare

David Finnegan-Hosey
Church Publishing Incorporated
churchpublishing.org

Emerging from David Finnegan-Hosey's personal experience of living with a diagnosis that was deemed a "preexisting condition" by insurance companies, this book explores the theological and spiritual dimensions of our public discourse around mental healthcare and mental illness and finds there the transformative reality of grace.



Reclaiming Church: A Call to Action for Religious Rejects

J.J. Warren
Abingdon Press
abingdonpress.com

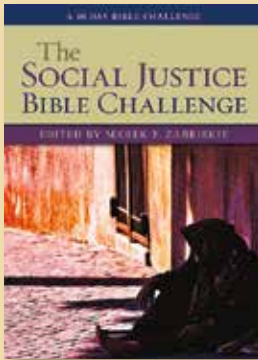
J.J. Warren continues his call to reaffirm that the church be welcoming to all in his new book. In it he addresses young people wanting to be part of a church community, and he closes the book with practical steps for joining voices, building bridges, and working together to reclaim church.



Speaking Truth: Women Raising Their Voices in Prayer

Editors: Theresa S. Thames, Emily Peck-McClain, Shannon Sullivan, Jen Tyler, J. Paige Boyer
Abingdon Press
abingdonpress.com

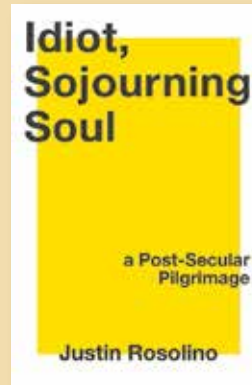
Women have been joining hands together for the purposes of societal change for as long as there has been injustice. These devotions and prayers are in response to the increasing challenges of our day, such as racism, bigotry, sexism, heterosexism, and xenophobia in the world and in the church.



**The Social Justice Bible Challenge:
A 40 Day Bible Challenge**

Editor: Marek P. Zabriskie
Forward Movement
forwardmovement.org

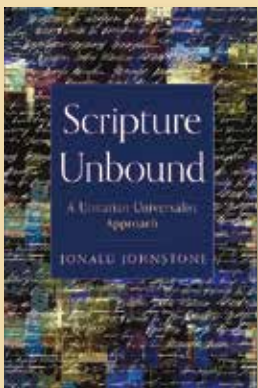
Featuring 40 days of reflections, this book is for those seeking to deeply engage in scripture and connect their compassion to God's word. Engage the Bible on topics including poverty, hunger, displacement, and the care of widows and orphans. Find new ways to connect actions to God's word.



**Idiot, Sojourning Soul:
A Post-Secular Pilgrimage**

Justin Rosolino
Wipf and Stock Publishers
wipfandstock.com

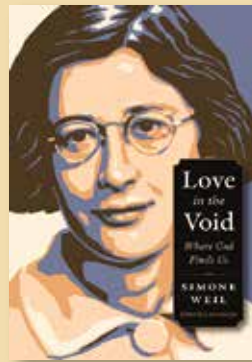
What is "Christianity," really? In a world where Trump, Obama, and Kanye all claim Christianity as their spiritual home, it's not an easy question to answer. Part tongue-in-cheek memoir, part historical-theological analysis, *Idiot, Sojourning Soul* tackles this question head-on, ultimately landing on a refreshingly orthodox explication of Jesus' message.



Scripture Unbound: A Unitarian Universalist Approach

Jonalu Johnstone
Skinner House Books
Available wherever books and eBooks are sold

Throughout the ages, adherents of religious traditions from around the world have set apart certain writings and teachings as special, calling them scriptures, sacred texts, or classics. This engaging volume invites readers into an adventure of encountering firsthand the words and stories that have inspired billions throughout the centuries.



Love in the Void: Where God Finds Us

Simone Weil
Plough Publishing House
plough.com/LoveInTheVoid

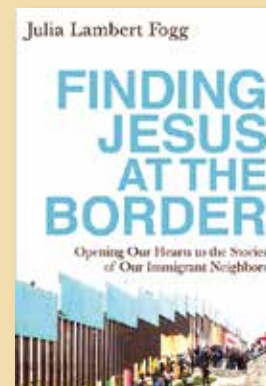
Why is it that Simone Weil, with her short, troubled life and confounding insights into faith and doubt, continues to speak to today's spiritual seekers? Was it her social radicalism, which led her to renounce privilege? Her ambivalence toward institutional religion? Her philosophical rigor with the ardor of a mystic?



Syriac-English New Testament

Editor: George Anton Kiraz
Gorgias Press
gorgiaspress.com

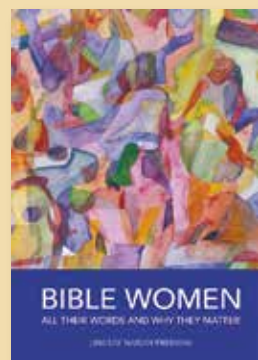
The Peshitta Bible is one of the earliest versions of Christian scripture and provides worshipers with a text that is directly translated from Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ. This single-volume, new edition of the Syriac-English New Testament includes people-centric pericope headings, annotations, colored Syriac paintings, and a historical introduction.



Finding Jesus at the Border

Julia Lambert Fogg
Brazos Press
Available wherever books are sold

The question of how Christians should respond to the immigration crisis has polarized many. Interweaving biblical stories with immigrant stories, this book will challenge you to open your heart to your neighbor. Discover a fresh look at well-known Bible stories that will inspire you to advocate for immigrant justice.



Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter

Lindsay Hardin Freeman
Forward Movement
forwardmovement.org

This groundbreaking book identifies every woman who speaks in the Bible, providing their words, context, and historical background. Questions at the end of each chapter encourage discussion and reflection about what we might learn from these women and how God is speaking through them to us.



In Time's Shadow: Stories About Impermanence

Marilyn Sewell
Skinner House Books
Available wherever books and eBooks are sold

Using a variety of short literary forms, ranging from dramatic monologues, vignettes, and letters to prose, poems, fantasy, and more, Sewell's fiction offers insightful, compassionate slices of life that will bring laughter and, at the same time, take you deeper into the mysteries of life.

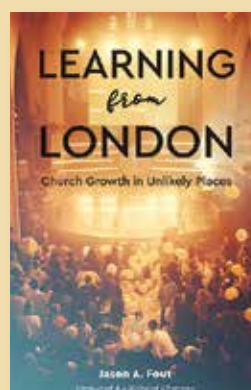
GREAT READS/ Books to inform and inspire



Poems to See By: A Comic Artist Interprets Great Poetry

Julian Peters
Plough Publishing
plough.com/PoemsToSeeBy

Graphic novel meets classic poetry. This stunning anthology of favorite poems, visually interpreted by comic artist Julian Peters, breathes new life into some of the greatest English-language poets of the 19th and 20th centuries. These are poems that can change the way we see the world.



Learning from London: Church Growth in Unlikely Places

Jason A. Fout
Forward Movement
forwardmovement.org

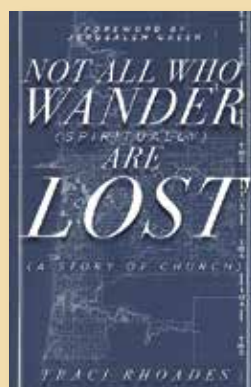
Based on over six years of study, Jason A. Fout offers lessons from London; one of the most diverse, multi-faith, urban, and pluralistic cities in the world, where churches are thriving against the odds.



The Case for Universal Health Care

David Colton
Clarity Press
claritypress.com

Provides readers with a description of the current health care system, why health care is so costly, and why it leaves nearly 30 million Americans without access to treatment. Colton provides an alternative approach that is economically sustainable and grounded in the ethical foundation of social justice and the common good.



Not All Who Wander (Spiritually) Are Lost: A Story of Church

Traci Rhoades, with a foreword by Jerusalem Greer
Church Publishing Incorporated
churchpublishing.org

In her debut book, Traci Rhoades walks readers through her faith journey, and how her experience with churches in a number of traditions has left her longing for more of Jesus than any one church offers. She also includes stories from other believers to give readers a sense of how alike, and different, our spiritual experiences can be.



Another Life Is Possible: Insights from 100 Years of Life Together

Editor: Clare Stober
Photographer: Danny Burrows
Plough Publishing House
plough.com/AnotherLifeIsPossible

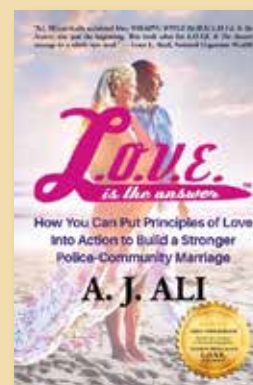
A stunning photo essay paired with 100 stories of members gives a rare glimpse into the Bruderhof, a Christian community that has stood the test of time. Meet individuals who ventured everything to build a life where everyone belongs and each can contribute, pooling their income, possessions, talents, and energy.



On Earth as It Is in Heaven: A Faith-Based Toolkit for Economic Justice

Eric Atcheson
Church Publishing Incorporated
churchpublishing.org

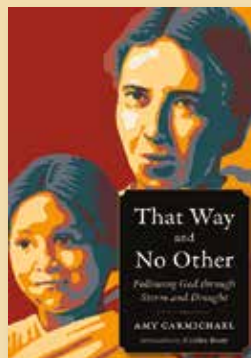
By critically examining biblical texts, church history, and present-day events and experiences, Eric Atcheson offers pastors, activists, and concerned citizens a faith-based toolkit for understanding and addressing the economic disparities present in their communities, as well as ways to initiate hopeful conversations.



L.O.V.E. Is The Answer

A.J. Ali
Eclipse
loveistheanswermovement.com

From the director of the award-winning film, *WALKING WHILE BLACK*: *L.O.V.E. Is The Answer*, this 482-page book is the definitive blueprint for improving relations between police and people of color. The director's edition of the book includes a free download of the film for personal viewing. Learn to put the powerful and transformational principles of L.O.V.E. into action in your community. Perfect for book clubs, small groups, and "the talk."



That Way and No Other: Following God through Storm and Drought

Amy Carmichael
Plough Publishing
plough.com/ThatWayAndNoOther

How do you stay true to God's call for your life? Amy Carmichael left everything to become a missionary in India. But then 7-year-old Pre-ena, fleeing sexual slavery, threw herself on the newcomer's protection. Could Carmichael relinquish a religious vocation to become a "nursemaid"?

THE MANY ARE CREATING WORSHIP SONGS FOR A SEGREGATED AND TUMULTUOUS TIME.



A

At the time most people head home after a typical workday, four musicians are just getting started. In a living room filled with holiday decorations and religious artwork, with inspirational phrases on the walls and bookshelves, Darren Calhoun, Leslie Michelle, Hannah Rand, and Gary Rand are rehearsing.

Music

Together, with Leonora Rand, they are The Many, a Chicago-based, social justice-focused worship band that pulls from gospel and indie pop to sing about topics not usually mentioned in worship music or

church. Their songs touch on police brutality, LGBTQ and immigrant inequalities, economic hardship, identity and uncertainty about faith and God, and doubt and justice amid violence.

“We were trying to find some songs that could give honest voice to our congregation, to what we were dealing with,” says producer Gary Rand, a longtime musician and former director of worship at LaSalle Street Church in Chicago, as well as former



director of worship and adjunct professor at McCormick Theological Seminary for 20 years. He says the band always felt a need for this kind of music, but once the group solidified in 2016 with its current members, its mission of speaking truth with a social justice lens to community issues took off.

The band's first album was *Advent & Christmas 2015*, followed by a 2017 release, *All Belong Here*. In November 2019, the group released its third studio album, *Love > Fear*, which has propelled The Many's efforts to create space for expressing the vulnerabilities people feel amid often segregated, sometimes violent, and politically tumultuous times—as well as Christ's overarching message that love is greater than fear and there is enough to go around.

The Many is partly a family affair. Lenora and Gary Rand have been writing music for decades, mostly singing about peace and justice. When their daughter, Hannah Rand, was 13, she became interested in songwriting as well, diving into her own solo music career and receiving national attention after winning a Grammy Foundation contest in 2013 with her song "Start Over." As a member of The Many, she writes all the melodies, with her father sometimes pitching in; her mother writes the lyrics.

However, Lenora stresses they're not just her words. "Every song feels like it's from our lives together," she says. "The songs and lyrics that come out of us come from us, not just me."

These inspirations help define the band's commitment to social justice. For Darren Calhoun, one of the lead singers, an associate fellow for racial justice with Evangelicals for Social Action and the worship leader at Chicago's Urban Village Church, social justice and faith are an integral pairing, although one that might not be familiar for all churchgoers.

"For many people, you go to church to get away from the news and away from what's wrong with the world," Calhoun says. "And while I get the desire for people to see church that way, I don't think that's who Jesus showed up

as in his earthly ministry. He showed up in a time that was political. He showed up in a time where people had major things going on socially and he spoke to those things, as he illustrated what the kingdom of God was."

Love > Fear is bringing that conversation into the church. The group provides honest reflections about finding God during hardship and relating to people's struggles in songs such as "Remember When," "Tear Down the Walls," and "Take Comfort."

While touring and speaking to fans, The Many has heard stories of how their new music is affecting a wide variety of people. The band says churches have sent them videos of their congregations singing their songs. "These Bodies," a song off *Love > Fear* that was inspired by co-lead singer Leslie Michelle, is about accepting one's body image. It has a personal meaning for the actor and worship leader.

"As a woman, and as an African American, it is exhausting and debilitating to consistently hear that your body wasn't sacred, that we have to beat our bodies, that our bodies are carnal and not good," says Michelle. "That's impactful as a woman, and it's definitely impactful as an African American when you're leaving the world to come into a safe place where your body is supposed to be safe and sacred."

At a panel discussion at a church in Kansas City, she remembers meeting a woman who said she heard the song because of her daughter's therapist. The band learned that there is a network of therapists who share the song to help those struggling with body issues and physical trauma.

For The Many, seeing people sing along to their music and hearing their gratitude is affirmation that the music is needed in church communities. Within evangelical and Protestant movements, "we're so keen on finding all the answers ... that we have problems and struggles with the mysteries of the deep," Michelle says. "I think mystery and questioning is rooted in the bedrock of the songs, for people to breathe, for people to cry, for folks to just sit with no thoughts and just be awash in the bigness of God." ♦

**"WE WERE TRYING
TO FIND SOME
SONGS THAT
COULD GIVE
HONEST VOICE
TO OUR
CONGREGATION,
TO WHAT WE
WERE DEALING
WITH."**

Ariel Parrella-Aureli is a freelance journalist in Chicago. Her work appears in Block Club Chicago, the *Windy City Times*, the *Chicago Reader*, and more.

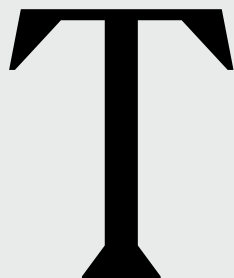
On Screen

Singer FKA Twigs performing a track from *Magdalene*.



CENTERING MAGDALENE

By Chris Karnadi



Two weeks after Kanye West released a gospel album with watered-down theology in October 2019, British singer-songwriter FKA Twigs dropped a marvelous piece of sparse electronica with a spiritual tenor.

Twigs' album is gospel in its theological significance. West's record is not.

Titled *Magdalene*, the 32-year-old Twigs' second album is a "revelation," according to *Pitchfork*. Throughout the album, the dancer-turned-R&B-genre-bender finds strength in the story of Mary Magdalene. The record's title track focuses on the Magdalene and the social implications of Jesus' relationship with her.

Twigs frames the album as a feminist reconsideration of Mary's story, pushing back on the fact that her narrative was ultimately told by male writers. Outside of Jesus' family, she is the woman most mentioned in the gospels. She was a patron of Jesus' ministry and among the first to have seen him resurrected. However, throughout much of history she has been conflated with the "sinful woman" in Luke 7 and, as a result, seen as sexually promiscuous. Twigs pushes against this patriarchal gaze and turns to the Magdalene for inspiration.

"It's easier to call her a whore, because as soon as you call a woman a whore, it devalues her," Twigs told Apple Music. She focuses on Mary on the margins instead of Jesus and the authors of the gospels. Doing so centers the narrative

on what, from the outside, might be considered unholy.

"A woman's work / A woman's prerogative / A woman's time to embrace / She must put herself first / A woman's touch / A sacred geometry," Twigs sings to open the title song.

Twigs' emphasis upon Mary's story tracks with modern scholarship. Elizabeth Schrader, a Ph.D. candidate in religion at Duke University, found evidence that a manuscript of the book of John used for modern translations had been altered to remove the Magdalene's name. Schrader argues that Mary's activities in the original book were divided into the activities of three different women, backgrounding Mary's importance and authority.

Twigs is right to point us to the richness of meditating and upending our understanding of the Magdalene. Identifying with a powerful woman in the gospels gives Twigs the ability to question the narrative—crafted by the patriarchs of the church—that influences the authority structure of both church and society.

Twigs listens to a woman's voice for inspiration and, in turn, we would do well to listen to hers. ❖

Chris Karnadi is an assistant editor of Duke Divinity's Faith and Leadership.

New & Noteworthy

DEPARTURES AND ARRIVALS

The Penguin Book of Migration Literature, edited by St. John's University professor Dohra Ahmad, with a foreword by the Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat, includes fiction, poetry, and memoir from the 18th century onward. From abolitionist Olaudah Equiano to Zadie Smith, this anthology honors the lives of migrants.

Penguin Classics



Faithful Response

Edited by Hak Joon Lee and Tim Dearborn, *Discerning Ethics: Diverse Christian Responses to Divisive Moral Issues* is a theologically rooted book with practical applications. Each chapter addresses a specific topic, offering Christians a guide for responding to 16 of the most important moral issues of our time.

IVP Academic



When We Began

"Indigenous bodies are bodies that remember," Kaitlin Curtice writes in her book *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. "We carry stories inside us." A citizen of the Potawatomi Nation, Curtice encourages her readers to examine their identities and seek fellowship with people different from them.

Brazos Press

THE CHURCH ACCORDING TO NETFLIX

By
Danny Duncan
Collum



Eyes & Ears

According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, art is supposed to imitate life. However, Oscar Wilde claimed that life more often imitates art. In the case of the recent Netflix movie *The Two Popes*

and warring camps within the Catholic Church, it may be hard to tell which is which.

The Two Popes—which depicts an imagined relationship between Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and his successor, Pope Francis—was bound to inflame tensions between those who believe that Francis wants to toss out historic church teachings on marriage and sexuality and those who suspect that anyone with a soft spot for the Latin Mass wants to bring back the Inquisition. Then, within weeks of the movie's release, we had the spectacle of Benedict appearing as co-author on a book about priestly celibacy that seemed like a timed rebuke to the limited openness to ordaining married men expressed at the Amazon Synod that was called by Francis. Benedict later asked that his name be removed from the book.

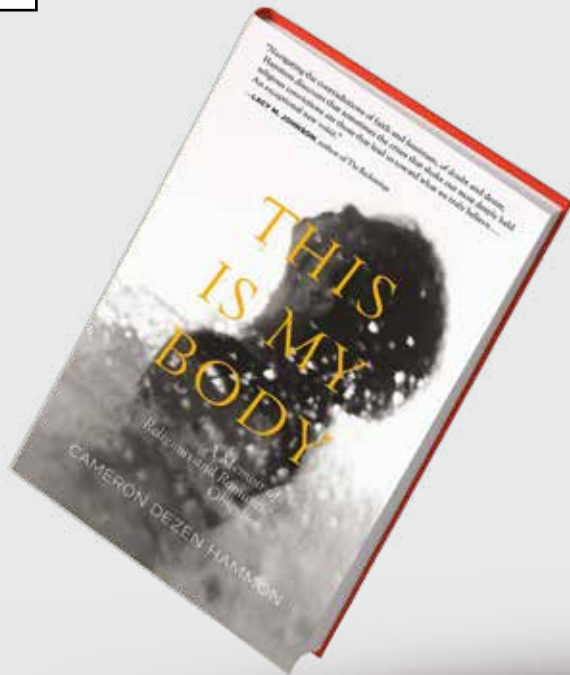
While, in the end, *The Two Popes* makes both popes into complex, 3D characters, the film largely conforms to the mainstream media caricatures of the two men. Francis is the hip, church-of-the-poor pope, humming “Dancing Queen” in the men’s room at the conclave of cardinals. Benedict is the red-slippered elitist who equates “change” with unacceptable “compromise.” These caricatures have festered in the dank echo chambers of the internet and resulted in a tragic self-sorting into “progressive” and “orthodox” camps.

Of course, reality isn’t as simple as the two camps would have it. For one thing, Benedict never backpedaled an inch on the church’s historic commitment to the poor or its condemnation of unfettered capitalism, and it was during his papacy that the church began to lead on the climate emergency. And Francis, while attempting to speak about hot-button issues in a more welcoming way, has not altered basic Catholic moral teaching or indicated any intent to do so.

As an adult convert to Catholicism, I’m frankly mystified by all this “campism.” To me, it seems that the two sides are either seeking to reclaim or seeking to escape a pre-Vatican II church that I know only from old Bing Crosby movies. My own entry to Catholicism came via Dorothy Day, who is herself the subject of a documentary film, *Revolution of the Heart*, that started airing on PBS stations this spring.

As the film shows, Dorothy Day was way left of today’s “progressives” in her insistence that the gospel demanded radical resistance to capitalism and its war machine. But she was also utterly orthodox in her devotion to the church and its teachings. In *Revolution of the Heart*, conservative Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York can be heard promoting Day’s canonization, and she may be just the kind of saint that’s needed today for a church divided against itself. ✕

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



SCIENTISTS HAVE DISCOVERED THAT THE PART OF THE BRAIN ASSOCIATED WITH ADDICTION IS ALSO ACTIVATED WHEN YOU'RE IN LOVE.

I'm supposed to believe, that God will fix this. Fix us. Fix my loneliness, meet my needs. Or if God is not meeting my needs, then the fault lies with me."

The turning point, and the memoir's *raison d'être*, is an emotional affair the author begins with an artist she meets. The affair forces Hammon to search for answers outside of her church and the version of God presented there.

Hammon finds comfort in a sex and love addiction support group at the recommendation of a therapist who tells her that "sex addiction is a spiritual disease" in which "the addict replaces God with a person."

The framing of Hammon's obsessive behavior regarding her affair as an addiction is the one problem I have with the book. Scientists have discovered that the part of the brain associated with addiction is also activated when you're in love, but I believe it's dangerous to define this state of mind as an addiction, even if they're related. The wonderful things our brains do when we're falling in love can be a healthy part of building a relationship, not an inherent sign

of deviant or unethical behavior. Hammon does not run from affair to affair. She falls for one man who offers her attention in the midst of a neglectful marriage. Simply labeling her desires as an addiction downplays, perhaps even nullifies, her human need for connection and support.

The affair happens mostly over text, and Hammon writes: "Falling in love with someone you cannot or do not see, someone invisible, is a lot like falling in love with God." Perhaps this is why Hammon's feelings for the artist are less vivid and grounded than those for her husband. The most riveting parts of the book aren't the affair, but the ways in which Hammon uses it to redefine her relationships with God and her husband on her own terms. ♦

Jera Brown writes about the intersection of their faith and sexuality at scarletchurch.com and edits the blog and anthology project sacredandsubversive.net.

DOGMA AND DESIRE

This Is My Body:
A Memoir of Religious and
Romantic Obsession,
by Cameron Dezen Hammon

Lookout Books

Is there a difference between being committed to one's faith and being obsessed with it? This question is indirectly posed in Cameron Dezen Hammon's debut book, *This Is My Body: A Memoir of Religious and Romantic Obsession*, which connects the hope, despair, and desire that someone can feel about a love interest or God.

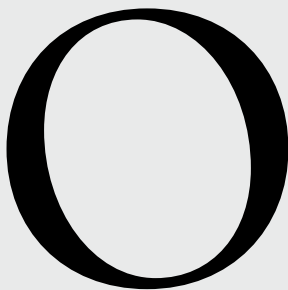
The memoir spans about 15 years of Hammon's life and describes her relatable parenting, money, work, and marriage hardships. Equally relatable is her struggle with the approaches to these issues presented by a series of Houston megachurches for which she and her husband act as music ministers. These churches preach a hierarchical (as well as homophobic and misogynistic) version of Christianity in which obedience to God will lead to success and happy marriages. An inclusive feminist, Hammon doesn't wholeheartedly subscribe to this doctrine, but neither does she know how to find meaning outside of it.

About her marriage, she writes, "I believe, or think

SEEKING TO SAFEGUARD

The #MeToo Reckoning,
by Ruth Everhart

IVP Books



"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" (Habakkuk 1:2). Ruth Everhart opens her heart-wrenching new book, *The #MeToo Reckoning*, with this lamentation. In a nation where, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Preven-

tion, more than one in three women are sexually assaulted in their lifetime, lamentation and tears seem a fitting place to start. But Everhart reminds us that to lament is not merely to cry out in anguish. To lament is also to bring pain to light, to air wrongs suffered, and, in the same impassioned breath, to call for justice.

It is this more fulsome form of lamentation that frames Everhart's book and undergirds her prophetic pronouncement against churches, calling on them to become braver and safer spaces, spaces more protective of the vulnerable, more supportive of victims and survivors, and more committed to seeking justice on their behalf.

Throughout *The #MeToo Reckoning*, Everhart, a Presbyterian pastor, recounts the incidents of sexual assault that she and others suffered and survived. From being raped inside a church to being assaulted by an elder on an overnight youth trip, these stories make for difficult reading. But they are important reading. Until we face the reality and extent of sexual assault, we will neither be able to properly support its victims nor bring this predatory behavior to an end.

Alongside these chilling accounts of abuse run the stories of congregations and clergy who failed to protect and support the less powerful within their fold. Whether seeking to safeguard their church's public image or raising the value of reconciliation above justice, each story illustrates a different way in which those who claimed to serve "the least of these" chose instead to undercut and imperil them.

More than an exposé on abuse in American churches, *The #MeToo Reckoning* provides a way forward for churchgoers and church leaders alike. From the story of Jesus healing the bleeding woman to the prophet Nathan

confronting King David for his rape of Bathsheba, Everhart offers healthier and more supportive readings of scripture. She also suggests numerous pragmatic changes to church policy, such as ending the use of nondisclosure agreements in church settlements for sexual abuse, as well as removing any statute of limitations on sexual crimes in their ecclesiastical laws.

Whether American churches will heed Everhart's call remains to be seen. Given their current, feeble response to the larger #MeToo movement, I am far from optimistic. But pessimism will do nothing to make our churches and communities braver and safer spaces; reading and sharing *The #MeToo Reckoning* might. ♦

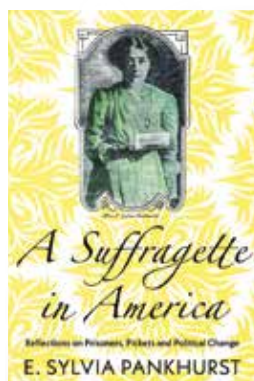
Jon Little, a freelance writer in Nashville, Tenn., writes on mindfulness, fatherhood, and faith at mindfuldaddy.com.

**UNTIL WE FACE THE
REALITY AND EXTENT
OF SEXUAL ASSAULT,
WE WILL NEVER BE
ABLE TO BRING THIS
PREDATORY BEHAVIOR
TO AN END.**

INTER-SECTIONAL FEMINISM CIRCA 1911

A Suffragette in America:
Reflections on Prisoners,
Pickets and Political Change,
by E. Sylvia Pankhurst, edited by
Katherine Connelly

Pluto Press



On March 25, 1911, the prominent British suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst, visiting the U.S. on a speaking tour, was suddenly notified about a grotesque tragedy on New York's Lower East Side. In what would come to be known internationally as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, 146 immigrant garment workers—mostly women—had died. Locked inside the workplace, they had no chance of escape. The event changed Pankhurst's life.

At this point, Pankhurst had already been in disagreement with her mother and older sister over their positioning of the Women's Socialist and Political Union, a women's suffrage advocacy group where she also worked. Her mother and older sister were moving it away from its leftist roots, marginalizing working women and emphasizing the role of wealthy women whose prominence helped drum up great media coverage for the cause.

In New York, however, Sylvia was getting deeply involved with militant working-class women tired of being pushed aside by blue-blooded suffragettes. The laundry workers' strikes greatly impressed Pankhurst, as did the garment workers' determination to make sure employer abuses like those that caused the Triangle fire deaths never happened again.

In *A Suffragette in America: Reflections on Prisoners, Pickets and Political Change*, editor and historian Katherine Connelly lucidly describes Pankhurst's transformation and embrace of justice beyond only women's rights, adding important original materials to support her legacy. In addition to the American influences that expanded her views, Pankhurst was in an intimate relationship with the original founder of the British Labour Party, Keir Hardie. Born into an impoverished family, Hardie had worked in the Scottish coalfields before adolescence and, through brilliance and hard work, became Labour's first representative in Parliament. *A Suffragette in America* is based on letters Pankhurst sent him during her trips to America.

Travelling around the U.S. on two separate tours in 1911 and 1912, Pankhurst saw horrifying prison conditions and the embedded racism of the Southern gentry. She went on break completely from her mother and sister to form the East London Foundation of Suffragettes, aimed at working women. She spent several years in Ethio-

**SYLVIA PANKHURST
WAS GETTING
DEEPLY INVOLVED
WITH MILITANT
WORKING-CLASS
WOMEN TIRED
OF BEING PUSHED
ASIDE.**

pia (where she eventually died in 1960) vehemently decrying the invasion and takeover of the country by Italy's fascist government in the 1930s and the colonialism found across Africa.

Pankhurst's broader, more inclusive political approach places her alongside early 21st-century feminists such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. ❖

Anne Colamosca is a former staff writer at *Business Week* and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.

Make a statement
about faith and
politics wherever
you go.

**God is not
a Republican
(or a Democrat)**

SOJOURNERS | SOJO.NET

Order a one-year
subscription to
Sojourners magazine
for \$19.95 and get
Sojourners' most
popular sticker **FREE!**

Call 1-800-678-9691
to place your paid order;
mention code S2005STK
and ask for your free sticker,
or order online at
sojo.net/sticker.

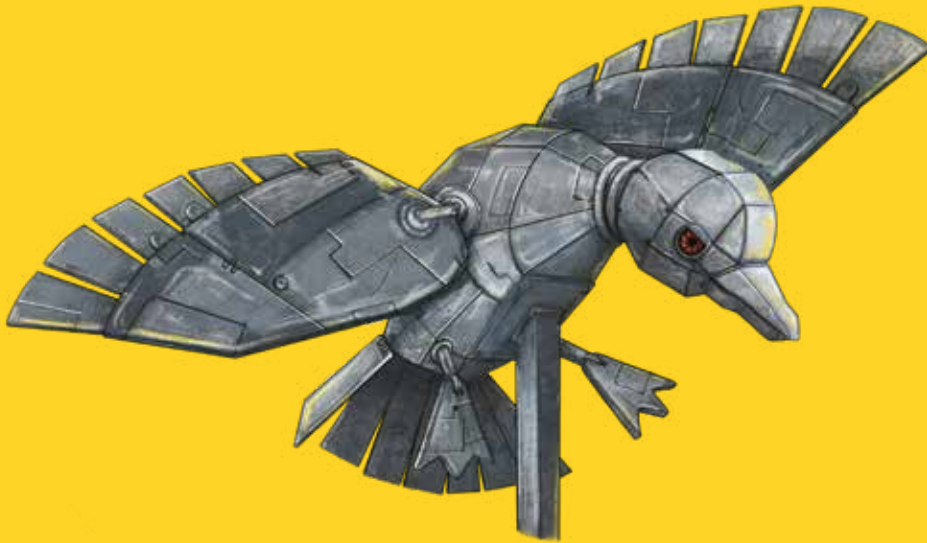
Sticker available
only with subscription.

SOJOURNERS

Poetry

GOING TO PRISON
IN AN AGE OF CORRUPT
POLITICS

By Jeanne Murray Walker



Some mornings I drive to the duck pond
instead of writing poems. I can't remember
how to keep words coupled to the truth.
So much lying has torn words loose
from what they stood for. Remember,
back when we agreed on their meanings?
I'd say *honey* for instance, and you could
taste it. Once you said *freedom*
and I saw doves rising from your shoulders.

We shared language so we were not alone.
We both loved words as if we could see them:
like ducks bobbing on a pond, dipping,
scooping, swabbing insects from the air.

Now they paddle among decoys.
I can't always tell which is which. *I promise*
sometimes signifies *I never said*. *No*
means *always*; *giving* means *taking*.

I try to keep the word *outrage* on a leash
like an obedient pit bull. Then one day
I answer a call: Baylor Correctional Facility
for Women. *Yes*, I will teach your ladies. I will
offer them the extreme weapon, language,
how to write themselves out of their procedural cold cells,
into some human truth they know but can't yet
say. I drive by the Friend's Meeting House,
reading the sign: *Let us see what love will do*.

Jeanne Murray Walker is the award-winning author of 10 volumes of poetry,
including her most recent, *Pilgrim, You Find the Path by Walking*.

Sustaining the movement.



“I have admired Sojourners’ courage and commitment over the years for its honest prophetic witness to the church and the world—commitment to the gospel and truth. The Spirit is at work in the world and Sojourners has given all of us great hope in what God is doing in our time of history. This is the good news that I want to support.”

—DENNIS DAVIS, Sustainers Circle
member since 2003

Join our Sustainers Circle of monthly donors today. You’ll receive a complimentary subscription to *Sojourners* magazine for yourself or for a friend or family member. It’s easy to get started online at **sojo.net/monthly**, or call **1-800-714-7474** and ask for donor relations. Thank you for supporting Sojourners’ mission to articulate the biblical call to social justice!

SOJOURNERS

PENTECOST'S UNFINISHED STORY

Scripture passages
are from the Revised
Common Lectionary,
Cycle A.

By Celeste Kennel-Shank



Living the Word

The Holy Spirit has a starring role leading up to Pentecost, not only on the day itself. Jesus prepares the apostles to receive “another Advocate.” Other readings jump forward to what occurs

when disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit. This could be an unusual level of holiness meant for a few, but it sounds like a holiness to which we can all aspire. Stephen and the apostles were granted heavenly visions or the ability to speak new languages. The challenge for believers today is to recognize when the Spirit of truth “comes upon” us.

A clue might be found in how Jesus describes the approach of the Holy Spirit to the disciples (Acts 1:8): This verb (*eperchomai*) conveys the sense of moving from a transcendent position toward one who is less powerful. The writer of Luke-Acts also uses the verb in this way when Gabriel answers Mary’s question about how it could be that she will bear the Messiah.

Mary, the apostles, Stephen, and others weren’t powerful to begin with. It is the Spirit who empowered them, who made risky discipleship possible. And the “signs and wonders” (Acts 5:12) that flow from being full of the Spirit aren’t always spectacular. We could be filled with the Spirit when we turn a vacant lot into a community garden. Or when we register new voters. Or furnish a home for a family seeking asylum. We don’t need a certain level of education, status, or holiness to live into Jesus’ promise that his followers can receive power to do great works (John 14:12).

Celeste Kennel-Shank is a journalist and Mennonite pastor who lives in Chicago.

THE SPIRIT EMPOWERED THEM TO MAKE RISKY DISCIPLESHIP POSSIBLE.

MAY 3

CHURCHES ‘HEAL’ DEBT

ACTS 2:42-47; PSALM 23;
1 PETER 2:19-25; JOHN 10:1-10

Amid “signs and wonders” by the apostles, Acts 2 describes how early Jesus followers provided for each other by selling off possessions and goods, praying together, sharing meals, and holding property in common. That may seem an impossible ideal.

But sharing resources beyond our individual household can be creative while supporting communal stability and security. The early Christians intertwined worship with economic relationships and forged bonds of community. Congregations can do this in diverse ways.

Several Chicago-area congregations have helped to raise money for canceling medical debt through a nonprofit organization called RIP Medical Debt. RIP uses the same method as debt collectors—it buys debt in bulk from brokers at a deep discount—except RIP then collects donations to clear the debt. Individual contributions as small as 50 cents or a dollar from people in the pews together wiped out thousands of dollars of medical debt, freeing a family. Members of the participating congregations rejoiced in worship that they could relieve financial stress, even while many of them also had such debt.

In my Anabaptist tradition, economic sharing includes the practice of “mutual aid.” Community members contribute to a fund and make disbursements from it when a person or household reveals a need that they can’t meet alone. We all have times of lean and plenty. We are all part of the same Shepherd’s flock.

MAY 10

NURTURE CURIOSITY

ACTS 7:55-60; PSALM 31:1-5, 15-16;
1 PETER 2:2-10; JOHN 14:1-14

When we become part of something larger than ourselves, a tension may arise. It's not easy to follow 1 Peter's encouragement: "Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5). In this epistle, the images for the life of discipleship are communal images, yet they point to the value of each individual person. If we see each one as a building block that holds up the whole, as priests capable of conveying God's presence, then we can't discount anyone. Churches committed to social justice and solidarity are not exempt from failing to see the way the Spirit is filling each person. Even when limits are removed on who can serve in specific roles, arrogance and superiority may still hold sway.

In *The Age of Overwhelm*, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky suggests that activists nurture curiosity and look for what others can teach us, instead of believing there's only one right way to do something. "Our individual desire to witness results is often not a crucial part of the collective process of creating meaningful change," she writes. When we accurately see our part in the whole, then we can become like "living stones" building up a spiritual house.

MAY 17

SLIPPERY HOPE

ACTS 17:22-31; PSALM 66:8-20;
1 PETER 3:13-22; JOHN 14:15-21

"Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you." Some hear this passage (1 Peter 3:15) as a call to give confession of faith, a lecture in apologetics, or to evangelize. Yet "the hope that is in you" is more slippery than these responses; it's tougher to grasp and whip out in a moment.

I grew up in activist circles and became a journalist as a young adult. These communities perennially ask: Where do you find hope? Lately, my hope is refined and reshaped by the suffering I witness—including that of parents separated from their children. Perhaps similar circumstances

prompted the psalmist to name God's testing: "You have tried us, O God, refining us, as one refines silver" (Psalm 66:10).

Slowly, I learn not to draw hope from success, especially in efforts for peace and justice. Victories deserve celebration, yes. But hope needs a deeper source. Catholic priest Henri Nouwen wrote, "Being neither an optimist nor a pessimist, Jesus speaks about hope that is not based on chances that things will get better or worse. His hope is built upon the promise that, whatever happens, God will stay with us at all times, in all places." Jesus promises that the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, will be with the disciples forever (John 14:16). This is a hope to hold on to, even if only by a thread.

MAY 24

NO MATTER THE COST

ACTS 1:6-14; PSALM 68:1-10, 32-35;
1 PETER 4:12-14, 5:6-11; JOHN 17:1-11

I spent five years as a global religion news editor. Scanning headlines each week demonstrated that no faith system was exempt from having some adherents who persecute those of another faith. Hindus and Buddhists oppress Muslims. Muslims attack Christians. Christians open fire on Jewish people at prayer.

Some U.S. Christians jockey for public attention by positioning themselves as persecuted, "undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:9) as Christians in other parts of the world. Do we try to distinguish among claims of persecution?

Persecution was part of the context of the church's first few centuries. And it has been a crucial element in Christian history. "Persecution is necessary in the church," Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero preached in 1977, "because the truth is always persecuted." The church does not seek persecution, but always seeks the truth.

Whether believers are persecuted by

**MY HOPE IS REFINED AND
RESHAPED BY THE SUFFERING
I WITNESS.**

others or not, we are united in closeness with the suffering Christ. In 1 Peter 4:13 we are invited to "rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings." But the opposite is also true: Christ shares in *our* sufferings. In John 17, Jesus prays that his followers maybe one, as Christ is one with God. Jesus has knitted us together into one body, sharing the Spirit who has known all that Jesus endured in the flesh and who strengthens us in our discipleship, no matter the costs.

MAY 31

EMBRACING ENEMIES

ACTS 2:1-21; PSALM 104:24-35B;
1 CORINTHIANS 12:3-13; JOHN 20:19-23

After the apostles receive the Spirit on Pentecost, a crowd of "devout Jews from every nation under heaven" gathers (Acts 2:5). Scholars note that this language emphasizes "the universal character of the Pentecost event," and that's true. But something else stands out as I place the map of nations in Acts 2 alongside a current world map. Pentecost was witnessed by the ancestors of people in several nations with which the U.S. has had tensions or open conflict in the past decade. The locations "beyond Judea" (and Judea itself) are today's Israel and Palestine. Mesopotamia is Iraq. In "Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene," militant groups that are offshoots of ones the U.S. has battled continue to operate. "Parthians, Medes, and Elamites" would now be Iranians.

Being filled with the Spirit grants the apostles fluency in languages they couldn't speak before—and allows diverse listeners to understand. It's difficult to imagine the barriers that divide us today torn down and replaced by understanding. The apostles might not have envisioned it either. Though the risen Christ had breathed the Spirit into them and told them they would receive power to become gospel witnesses to the ends of the earth, the apostles weren't fully convinced or prepared. They couldn't have fully known what they would be capable of after the Holy Spirit moved toward them, came upon them, filling the less powerful with power. ✕

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumpths



ATTORNEY GENERAL, OR JUST A CANDLE IN THE WIND?

By Ed Spivey Jr.

By the time you read this, Attorney General William Barr will have resigned in disgust, or been fired in disgust, or is still on the job, disgusting the rest of us. Or has been forgotten by an American public that at this moment is preparing to shelter in place from the COVID-19 pandemic, which I wasn't allowed to write about because "Pandemics aren't funny, Ed!" Unlike William Barr, who isn't funny either, except for one thing ...

Anybody else think William Barr looks like Elton John? Barr never wears those heart-shaped glasses during congressional hearings, but other than that—and the pinstripe suits Elton wouldn't be caught dead in—I can't tell the difference. It would be nice if Barr actually *was* Elton John; then he would spend more time at the piano and less time undermining judicial process and the rule of law.

I'd have little complaint if the worst thing the attorney general had done was write "Philadelphia Freedom," a song so sappy it makes me hide from the radio, unpatriotically, and that's hard to do while driving. I'd let that slide, of course, if he had also written "Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting"—which still gives me chills at the hook—and a dozen other hits that occupy what's left of my aging brain cells. I might not remember the names of beloved relatives, but I'll never forget the words to "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road": "Goodbye yellow brick road, where the something ti tum ti tum, you can't plant me in the something, I'm going tum ti tum it tum ..." Great song.

But back to William Barr. Regardless of his current status of employment, he will always be remembered for his decisions to intervene in cases involving friends of the pres-

ARE THERE ADVANTAGES TO BEING A BANANA REPUBLIC, ASIDE FROM THE BANANAS?

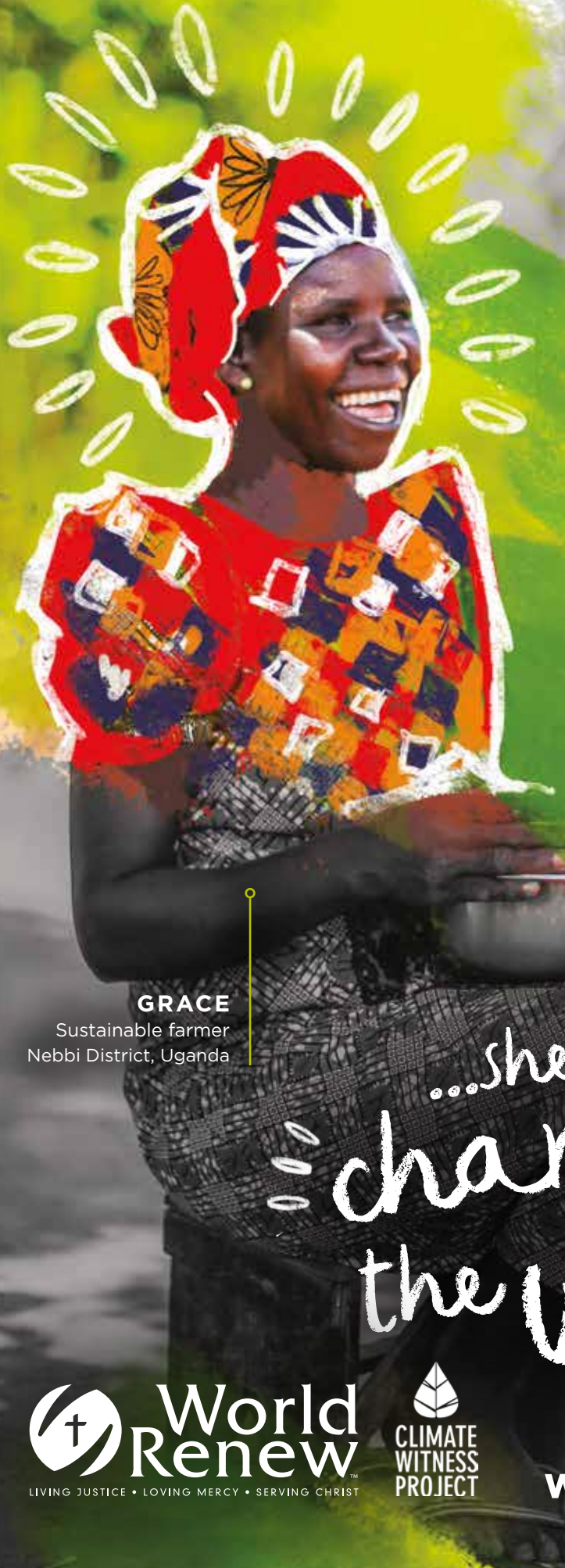
ident by overruling line prosecutors and his challenges to settled law. He may agree that Justice is blind, but he sees that as a serious handicap, and wants to help by putting a thumb on one of her scales. An advocate of "traditional values," the only thing he likes about Lady Justice is the length of her dress.

Barr has a well-known affection for an unencumbered executive branch, an imperial presidency that on its best days only works if the king is not a narcissist flirting with madness. Despite that, Barr short-circuited due process with impunity, whitewashing the Mueller report by downplaying its corrosive findings, accusing his own FBI of spying, and gaslighting us with disproven conspiracies about Ukraine, to name just three. (To be honest, I've never been clear on this gaslighting thing. But I think it means keeping matches in the bathroom.)

Barr is partly motivated by his anxiety at society's inevitable change, and in a speech last October at Notre Dame (the one with the football team), he blamed the country's "moral chaos" on an eroding religious commitment. (Although I doubt he's concerned about low attendance at mosques.) Like conservative icon William Buckley, Barr wants to "stand athwart history, yelling stop," even though when you stand athwart, your legs are at a funny angle, which totally ruins the moment.

Regardless of where Barr's career ends, his legacy will be part of our nation's steady collapse into a banana republic. And although banana republics have healthier levels of potassium—which is good if you suffer from leg cramps at night—the daily psychological charley horse Donald Trump provokes makes me get out of bed and listen to Elton John. And discover that, even though I never understood the lyrics when I first listened in my dorm, "Madman Across the Water" finally makes sense. ♦

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of *Sojourners* magazine.



When you
change
a story...

STORIES start small. A village savings program. Access to clean water. 1,000 days of healthy food to start a baby's life. But rarely do stories stay small. Because when you renew hope in one story, you renew hope in every life that story touches. You renew hope for many. One story can change far more than you imagine.

GRACE

Sustainable farmer
Nebbi District, Uganda

...she gets to
change
the world.

 **World
Renew**
LIVING JUSTICE • LOVING MERCY • SERVING CHRIST

 **CLIMATE
WITNESS
PROJECT**

Give to a story at
worldrenew.net/sojo

MASTER OF DIVINITY OR THEOLOGY?

Ministry in the church, or personal and professional development? Our three-year Master of Divinity is the foundational degree required for ordination in many Christian traditions. Our two-year Master of Theology degree is customizable, online or on campus, so you can pursue other professional opportunities where ethics and relational skills are essential.

Excellence in Theological Master's, Doctoral, and Certificate Programs

- 150 years of social justice, spirituality, and innovation
- Online and on campus
- Generous scholarships
- Welcoming, multicultural, and multifaith community



UNIVERSITY OF
Redlands
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Home of
SAN FRANCISCO
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

LEARN MORE

www.redlands.edu/gst 415-451-2800

